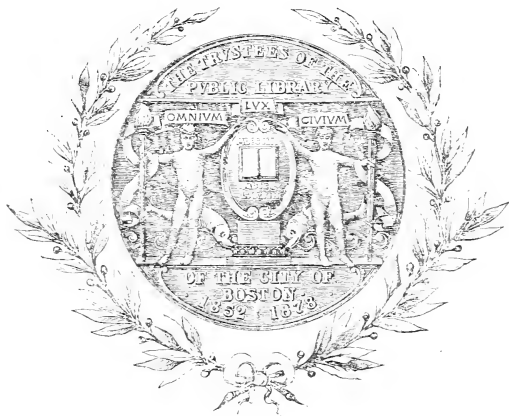


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Cissy splashed the water idly with her willow pole.

FRONTISPIECE. *See Page 257.*

THE MAIDEN
MANIFEST

BY

DELLA CAMPBELL MacLEOD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

HARRIET ROOSEVELT RICHARDS

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1913

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THE MAIDEN MANIFEST

CHAPTER I

THE BLUE GOWN

" I am Town, —
I am all that ever went with evening dress !"
— KIPLING.

"What time the mighty moon was gathering light,
Love paced the thymy plots of Paradise."
— TENNYSON.

WILLIAM RUTLEDGE, better known to a wide circle of friends as "Billy," left the six-day bicycle races at Madison Square Garden at three o'clock in the morning of the fifth day. His eyes were heavy and bloodshot; his head was going round like a Catherine wheel. He had watched the hunched-over riders for hours making the ring like automatons, with only an occasional "spill" to break the monotony of their dizzy circling. In the confusion of one of these interruptions he staggered through the sea of perspiring, beer-drinking humanity, blinded by tobacco smoke and dust, and made his way to the street.

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If New York is a gorgeous flower that opens to perfection at midnight to sweet odors and seductive music, — the flower's bloom fades as quickly; it is gone by three. Withered and stale, the blossom has dropped from its stem, an artificial rose of yester-hour. Once out in the clean, cold, December morning, Billy threw back his shoulders and took a deep breath of the fresh air. He was dizzy and tired and sleepy. He strolled leisurely to the Metropolitan Tower corner and stood quietly contemplating the scene before him. It was one from which the keen edge had not been altogether blunted, though New York was getting to be a story of which he rather wearied.

Madison Square drowsed in an almost ethereal yellow haze that spread its curtain of gossamer mist over the flotsam and jetsam of life thrown up by the restless tide of the city on the beach of the friendly benches under these trees. The lights from neighboring skyscrapers showed the square deserted save by such sleepers. In all his twenty-eight years, Billy Rutledge had never been hungry without some prospect of food, or weary without a bed waiting for him somewhere, or in cruel need of work with no situation in sight. So the occupants of the benches made no special appeal to his sympathy.

They were only lay figures in the stage setting of a familiar scene from life, with the property driftwood

of peanut shells at their feet to testify mutely to the menu of their evening meal, — their unkempt heads pillowed on stray "Help Wanted" ads from various afternoon papers, perhaps to induce dreams of prosperity past or to come. The silhouettes of "night-hawks" on their waiting cabs ranged in military line formed a guard inclosing the open-air sleeping quarters of the seedy derelicts. Occasionally the file of these was broken by the luck of a passing fare.

Billy swung his broad shoulders back and started at a brisk pace for his rooms down-town. He waved back solicitous cabbies who trailed patiently after him, and struck out by Fourth Avenue for Gramercy Park. On the corner of Twenty-third Street a well-dressed, intoxicated youth was gravely assuring everybody in hailing distance that the night did have a thousand eyes — look at them automobile lamps! Billy heard him start on the second verse as he turned at the next corner.

"Gad," he tried to shut his ears to the sacrilege of the maudlin singer, — "but they knock the dew off of everything, in this town!"

What was it that induced Billy Rutledge, tired and sleepy as he was, to walk home, when ten cabbies more or less importuned him to ride to-night as on other nights? Probably it was the same guiding star that led him past innumerable lighted windows without so much as a glance into them, and finally drew him up

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sharply before the dimly lighted window of a cleaner's shop on his own corner !

The window was poorly lighted by a fly-specked, electric-light bulb and by the reflection of an arc light farther down the street. The sickly glow from the two threw fantastic shadows on a gown, cleaned and ready to be sent home, hanging with sleeves outspread on a support from a hook in the center. It was this gown that held the fascinated gaze of Billy Rutledge. It was built of pale blue ribbon and lace, a row of lace alternating with one of ribbon. The skirt broke into a perfect sea foam of lace about the bottom; the sleeves were half short; a little, blue satin girdle with five jeweled bows on it was carefully pinned into place.

"By Jove," he ejaculated, leaning nearer, "a gown like this reminds a fellow of his little sister, even if he hasn't got one. Only a girl created to be somebody's sweetheart could wear a frock like it." He rubbed his eyes and leaned nearer. "I'm sick of it all," he said slowly, nodding toward the brilliant chain of lights over on Broadway. A clock in a neighboring church struck four, and he was still meditatively gazing at the blue gown. "It can't be that I'm drunk,"—he turned away his head and put his hand up to conceal a yawn. "What's the matter with me, anyway? I'm stalled; can't move an inch. What's keeping me? You're keeping me," he accused, under his breath, pointing a reproachful forefinger at the garment.

Suddenly the thing stirred; he rubbed his eyes. Impossible! The window was inclosed on all sides with glass; not a breath of wind could possibly reach it. The dress billowed softly and was blown towards him; the next moment it hung motionless, in its first position. Of course he had imagined the movement. "I wonder," he mused aloud, "what kind of a girl would wear a gown like this!" He turned at the corner and retraced his steps. "It's a duck of a frock," he said under his breath. "If I knew the girl that this dress belongs to, I'd spend the rest of my life trying to persuade her to let me pay for having her gowns cleaned."

Once away from the window the vision did not depart. In front of him down the street the gown moved! Moved, for now there were no cobwebs over his eyes; sleep had fled. The gown, like a will-o'-the-wisp, was about fifty feet in front of him and he could not gain on it, however much he quickened his pace. Above its azure tints and shadows, blurred by the street light into a tissue of moonlight and embodied music, he caught a fleeting glimpse of bronze hair piled high and the faintest glimmer of a sea-shell ear. He must be gaining. Again she disappeared. He brushed his eyes incredulously; there she was almost close enough for him to touch. His arms closed on empty air. A milk wagon rumbling by reminded him that it was close on to five o'clock. He brushed his eyes to clear them of possible

faery mists. The girl and the blue gown had vanished. His common sense counseled him to go home.

Once in his rooms he started to pour himself a brandy-and-soda to clear his disordered brain, when a slim arm sheathed in lace caught the glass away.

"I'll be —" he started back in affright. "I'm rip roaring drunk already," he apologetically assured himself. "Blue dresses on the brain are a million times worse than bats!" With which observation he tumbled into bed and fell asleep.

"Hanged if I didn't dream about it," the same young man addressed his reflection in the mirror the next morning at half-past eleven o'clock, as he made his toilet for the day. What it was he had dreamed he vainly tried to remember. The dream was gone. The whole affair, everything connected with the gown, was nebulous, as far away as a summer cloud, as elusive as the gray-blue mists of twilight.

"William Rutledge," he admonished seriously, with suspended military brushes above his black hair, "don't make a bigger fool of your precious self than nature and circumstance have already fashioned you. Forget the cerulean garment!"

His intention was to give the shop of Louise on the corner a wide berth, but his feet led him straight in that direction.

The blue gown still hung in the window. He drew

up before it with a grave salute, lifting his hat. Viewed in the sunlight it was ten times prettier than in the gloom of the previous night. It was as fresh and clean as the morning itself. It held the Spring, even as the wet pink roses a Syrian boy hawked on the corner were reminiscent of April mornings in country gardens.

"Somehow these evening gowns," he was remarking inwardly, "always look so draggle-tailed by daylight." This one, however, had no train, though it was long enough to indicate that the girl who wore it was not short. "I'm glad of that," he approved, glancing at his own six feet two reflection in the window. Standing there, gazing like an infatuated Freshman at his first music-hall love, the fly-specked window was transformed into a crystal ball, and the man before it was seeing as many impossible things as the White Queen in "Alice" did before breakfast.

He conjured up the girl who would wear a frock like this one, — a dress made up of daisy-patterned lace and soft blue ribbon. He knew in some occult way that she must have eyes as blue as violets, though prior to this Billy had been under the impression that his preference was for brown-eyed maidens. Her hair grew down in a point on her forehead and was looped up behind in a torrent of curls. Sometimes, when she wore this gown, she stuck a little blue bow in it to bring out its bronze lights. She had a skin like cream, with cheeks that

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wild roses had been robbed to stain a fainter coral. Her slim little rounded throat would be bare in this gown and her shoulders — The vision faded as he strained his eyes to look at her hands. He could not see them, but he hoped they were long and slender, and faintly pink.

“I’d make her wear a blue ring,” he boasted. “I’ve got the very turquoise for it. I’ll have it set for her Ladyship to-day. Oh, I’m going to find you!” was the telepathic challenge he sent to the blue gown as he moved away, remembering he had eaten nothing. He laughed at his own delusion; the gown again billowed and blew softly, almost an imperceptible moment, in his direction.

Lingering over his noonday breakfast, William Rutledge looked himself squarely in the face. He opened the prosecution by charging the plaintiff at the bar, who was himself, with growing to be a degenerate cur. “You’re getting used to this lap-dog life,” he remarked, as he buttered a roll. “Six years ago when you were getting up at four o’clock in the morning, instead of going to bed at that hour, to go to the little ‘Trust Luck’ mine that has brought you this,” — his eyes swept the luxuriously appointed club dining-room, — “you couldn’t have kept your eyelids closed after five. Now you are sleeping until ten and eleven o’clock. Then you ate hard tack and corned beef, and your muscles were hard as nails. Now you have grown an appetite for sweet-

bread and omelettes — and you're soft as breakfast food sopped in cream —"

Behind the morning *Sun*, William Rutledge was thinking, not of the market reports, though his eyes seemed to be focused on that part of the page. "Cupid at the Cleaner's, by Jove!" he murmured softly. "Could my heart have been his target?" His eyes held the expression of a man who surreptitiously removes a bandage to investigate the progress of his wound.

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CHAPTER II

YOUR FEET ON MY FENDER !

"I wake with sunshine in my eyes
And find the morning blue,
A night of dreams behind me lies
And all were dreams of you, —
Ah, how I wish the while I rise
That what I dream were true!"

— *India's Love Lyrics.*

SIX years before, when a senior at Princeton, William Rutledge had had occasional glimpses into the charmed life of New York clubmen. He had longed then for the wherewithal to establish himself in surroundings of luxury and to live the life his rich classmates would lead when the college grind was over.

After graduating, he left the ancestral plantation in the South to try his fortunes in the West. A gold mine in which his visionary father had sunk all his money before he died was the lure that led him to Colorado. He took this for his part of the inheritance and left "Bayside," the family plantation home, to his elder brother Bob, who had in the meantime married Clothilde Devereaux, a young Creole girl from New Orleans. The mine that had been the family jest for years had

more than justified his belief in it. The first years in the West were harder than Billy ever admitted; but he had been joined in his enterprise by Burke Preston, a college friend, and their perseverance had finally won out of it a story-book reward. The vein was rediscovered and Billy was rich, Burke Preston was rich, — and the end was not yet. The "Trust Luck" mine was now ranked as one of the most desirable pieces of mining property in Colorado. On the market it was worth millions. Its owners knew that billions were still in its unsounded bottom.

Billy had taken charge of the New York office and had been East six months. His family, his college associations and his wealth had opened to him every desirable door in the social and business world. But after the first few weeks society saw him no more. The dinners bored him; the women were tiresome, the girls merely talking dolls. He was distinctly disappointed to find he had outgrown his senior softness for petticoats. He had been looking forward to falling in love again with every pretty face he met as he had done in the old days. He found himself strangely indifferent. Six years of hard work, he finally decided, had knocked all the play out of him.

The panicky days of October and November left him leisure to waste as he pleased. He went in for dissipation. Good-looking, young and generous as a prince

in the Arabian Nights, his name was a synonym for prodigality along Broadway. Behold him on this particular morning in one of New York's most exclusive clubs, disgustedly reviewing the past few months and reflecting on the husks that money buys.

He was tired of it all. He sauntered up Fifth Avenue, turning at the first cross-street to avoid St. James Stuyvesant. Three months ago he had something of a taste for St. James; now the sight of that one wearied him. "The trouble isn't with them," he generously argued; "it's with myself. I've outgrown, if I ever had it, my taste for men and women of the world. My lungs have developed a thirst for fresh air and fresh-air people that New York can never satisfy. I'm going back to the mine. Burke was right, — making money is more fun than spending it."

He went to dinner with a San Francisco man, Joel Chalmers, with whom he had a land deal on; afterwards they went to the theater. Billy's attention was arrested from the time the curtain went up; the play gripped him, in theme and development. His companion found him strangely unresponsive. When the curtain fell on the last act he made some excuse for not going to supper, and strolled off alone. The discontent of the past weeks had to-night crystallized into a definite resolve. Billy had made up his mind to go back West. The East had nothing to give him. He could feel the blasé lines form-

ing about his mouth, he knew the hideous puffs were slowly crawling up under his eyes. He wanted to get off by himself somewhere — quick.

He walked home as he had done the previous night. Before he was aware that he was in the vicinity he drew up before the window of the cleaner's shop. The blue gown shimmered like moonlight on the waters of Puget Sound. He was in love with a senseless frock. His masculine intelligence did not suggest to him premises that would have come naturally enough to a woman interested in the identity of the owner of the garment. He felt the spell of its pervading femininity, but he was impotent when it came to reducing the matter to one of everyday intelligence.

Now any woman, even one not endowed with the detective instinct with which every daughter of Eve is born, could have told him several things pointing to the identity of its wearer. The first of these was that she was young. There was youth in the gown's slender proportions. The ruffles of sea-foam lace, to a close observer, showed torn places, cunningly darned. The very nature of these gave evidence of having been "danced out." Its owner was not a New York girl, an astute observer would have argued, for the gown was "sweet" rather than smart. It might have been built by a village dressmaker; again the simplicity of its lines declared a Parisian origin. But it was neither the

design of the gown nor the color scheme that held its potential charm. The garment was instinct with personality. It breathed forth an allurements unmistakable. The eternal feminine lurked in its folds. It was a gown that held the individuality of its wearer, — one of those intimate frocks that seem to possess a human intelligence, sympathy. Such a one of which we women often say: "Why, you could tell that dress — anything!"

A woman might have told Billy Rutledge many things about the garment. Even that its wearer was of blond coloring, for only certain shades of skin and hair go with this peculiar shade of blue. So, the deducer would have advanced from one point to another: the girl in question must have been of this coloring or the dress would not have been becoming, and if the dress had not been becoming, it would not have been worn to its present state. It was very apparent that the owner loved the gown. As evidence to support the last premise, wasn't the garment here in the cleaner's shop when its dissolving tissues were more nearly ready for the rag-bag? Girls seldom have dresses cleaned for which they have no particular affection. Yes, this frock, any feminine reasoner would have staked her all on, was the pet of its owner and dear to her for its associations.

"Whoever you are and wherever," he finally observed silently, "you've got me on your string of fish, tied in a

hard knot and the spell has been worked through a silly frock." He rubbed his eyes. Was the dress moving again? Wh-at? He leaned nearer.

A girl seemed to be hiding behind it. From beneath the skirt peeped the slenderest little foot he had ever seen. There was the proud arch of an instep that water could flow under, and just a glimpse, a tantalizing, disappearing glimpse, of a silk-stockinged ankle. The slippers were of suede with rhinestone buckles. The next moment the vision faded. In vain he rubbed his eyes and peered closer. The dress hung demurely on its wooden support. Not even a ripple disturbed its unintelligent indifference to the surroundings. A policeman farther up was growing concerned in Billy's interest in the window. He moved nearer to keep an eye on the place.

"By gad," the tragic lover mused aloud, "but you *have* got a pretty foot. Only a family tree could explain such an instep. Are you an Arabian princess?"

Being wise in his generation, he did not argue the matter with the policeman, who finally approached to learn his business about the shop. He good-naturedly suggested that he might be waiting for some one.

"Sure an' stay as long as you loike," the other invited, as Billy offered him a cigar with a genial good night. "Maybe she'll come yit!"

He went to his apartment with a high hope in his

heart. He knew there was no use going to bed; he couldn't sleep. Accordingly he filled his pipe, the pipe that had been a companion to dreams as vaguely sweet as this one, since they had but foreshadowed what was to come to him in this new experience, — the pipe that had cheered him through the chill dawn of those hard, working days when he sought what often seemed rainbow gold. He settled down in an easy chair, and stretched his long legs to the blaze. He closed his eyes and puffed thoughtfully away. This was something like it! At least life had given back to him a dream in petticoats; even if it were only a dream, he was grateful for that much. He realized with sudden boyish enthusiasm that he was as young as when he started forth, a reverend senior. The fire sputtered and crackled; a glowing coal hit the hearth and interrupted his reminiscences.

Stooping to restore it to the grate, he looked up. On the other side of the mantel, not three feet away, stood the girl of the blue gown! He didn't betray by the slightest sound that he had seen her. Something held his lips silent. She was looking down, and he studied, as if dazed by the suddenness of the apparition, her eyelashes! They were long and bronze tinted, sweeping her very cheeks. It was foolish that he should consider anything so trivial when She herself stood there. He heard himself say quite naturally: "In a story," — it was as if he were detached and listening to another speak,

— “they would be black. But in reality they are exactly the color of her hair.”

The girl looked up at this and frankly at him. The firelight cast a rosy glow on her face. She seemed to retreat before his scrutiny, and yet — he couldn't seem to realize that she was there. He studied her, forgetful of his responsibilities as a host. Her eyes rested on him with quite the same unconventional directness. They might have been two portraits regarding each other.

Suddenly, as if he appreciated the moment might depart with its opportunity, he started up. She divined his intentions and faded, a very wraith of herself, over toward the door. He settled himself back into his chair. Plainly she was a young woman who had to be approached very guardedly. Once before the chase for her had ended in his holding empty air.

“I — er — I,” he began ruefully, “didn't succeed in overtaking you last night !” His tone begged the question what had become of her.

Her reply was an inscrutable smile. Now she was as vivid as ever. He must see to it that she didn't get gauzy before he found out something about her. She didn't look as if she were in a hurry. She regarded him with eyes as frank as a child's.

“Won't you let me get you a chair ?” he begged, motioning to one near the desk. “Now that you are here, you really owe it to me to let me make you comfortable.”

He dared not move without her permission, for fear she would fade away.

She smiled but shook her head. There was a hassock near where she stood. She indicated that she could sit on this if she wished to do so.

"I—er—see you've got on your dress," was his next idiotic attempt at conversation. He intended to put it differently; to say that it was The Dress she had on. But once he said it, he let it go at that.

She laughed so mockingly he accused her of twisting his tongue. With that she drifted close enough for him to put out a hand and touch her, but discretion cautioned him not to. She was leaning against the mantel, her head tipped forward until it touched a pile of books lying there.

"Oh, come now," he begged, "let's have this thing out. You're somebody's astral body. Tell me whose!"

She regarded him with the calm eyes of the Sphinx.

"Maybe the girl who is your real self is at this moment dancing with some other fellow in that same blue gown," he continued.

She encouraged his speculations with amused eyes.

"Do you know," — he tried other tactics, — "you're the first girl I've been interested in since I left college. You've hit my heart where I thought it had healed over. Are you," bending nearer, "the reincarnation of one of my freshman loves? There were so many!"

The girl waited for him to answer his own question by moving directly into the radius of light from the lamp. He saw a tea-rose face, a mop of tawny, bronze hair heaped in a tumbled psyche of curls,—then she drifted back into the shadow.

"Really," he remarked, with the assurance of an old friend or a brother, "I couldn't stand it if there were any paint on your face. There isn't,"—leaning nearer her.

She made the ghost of a *moue* at him, and the fire, stirred to sudden brilliance, caught her smile in its reflection and dazzled him. It was almost a challenge. Her chin was in a pink palm; she was mocking him with an inscrutable smile. He was telling his heart it must remember—it must remember. Her face was of the purity of a child's.

"You're about Marjorie's age,—she's my small niece," he commented impersonally, "no matter how many candles you are entitled to on your birthday cake, young lady!"

Her gaze wandered about the room. There were many books on the low shelves that ran the entire length of the place; a desk, a big table that held a reading lamp under which were piled magazines and all the daily papers in confusion. Four or five wonderful Persian rugs redeemed the place from actual bareness; these with the open fire and a few good chairs gave an atmos-

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phere of comfort to the room. The only pictures on the walls were a group of old hunting prints near the desk. On the mantel a big tobacco jar and various pipes divided the space with another heap of books. It was back to these that the eyes of the girl returned. They were like those on the table, geological in the main with a few volumes of travel and more on mines and mining conditions.

"There's nothing among my books that would interest you," he regretted. "I'm not much on novels, you observe. But here, in the afternoon paper," reaching for the *Evening Telegram*, "is an item that might." She turned expectantly.

"Want to see it?" he asked. She made no move to take the paper he extended, pointing to a first-page story.

"Well, then, I'll read it to you," he said. "There is some similarity in this case; maybe it explains about you." She bent forward attentively, waiting for him to begin.

He read aloud:

"Chicago, Ill. Saturday. Miss Rosalind Franklin, daughter of Jordan L. Franklin, whose psychic experiments have startled local society, is in New York, preparing for a trip to France, where according to friends, she is to make personal investigation of recent psychical experience in which her astral body went to that country and bound up the wounds of a sailor boy injured in a storm off the Breton coast."

J ed reading to glance at her. She was listening eagerly. "You see," he observed, "this Miss Franklin is now in New York, the paper says. I wonder," speculatively, "where her astral body is to-night, — if it's wandering in search of local color — or winging over the blue ocean." She motioned for him to continue reading. "I suppose," plaintively, "that you wouldn't tell me if you knew." Apparently she had no idea of telling him anything.

"The spirit control," he continued, "informed Miss Franklin that she accomplished her deed of mercy when a raging storm was in progress. That she gave the relief of a trained Red Cross nurse to the poor wretches battered up by the storm, but her special protégé was this young sailor. He would have died if she had not bandaged his wounds. She gave him an American bank note of a large denomination and sent him on his way rejoicing."

Billy's eye ran casually down the long column. "She belongs," he explained, "this Miss Rosalind Franklin does, to Chicago's social elect. She is young and lovely, and her father owns a sausage plant and a big grain business." He stopped thoughtfully, turning to his visitor. "Now you," he spoke half to himself, "don't look as if *your* father owned a sausage plant. I shouldn't say," deliberating, "that I would take you for the daughter of a wholesale grain dealer either. But then — we never can tell!" he reminded, cheerfully going back to the paper.

"Miss Franklin has not altogether accepted the story of her nocturnal adventure in France. She has no recollection of having

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rendered aid to the sailor boy. The matter, however, has been subsequently investigated by the captain of a ship which runs into that port. He corroborates the story to the smallest particular. Further evidence that the spirit guide was truthful in his revelations is adduced by the sworn testimony of a bank official who was called upon the day following the wreck to change an American bank note of large denomination for a sailor boy who was much bandaged and who told that he had been badly hurt in the wreck."

"For all I know," Billy threw aside the paper and leaned toward the girl, "you may be Miss Franklin — Miss Rosalind Franklin of Chicago. Are you?"

She shook her head emphatically.

"You don't look like Chicago," he said, meditatively surveying her, "but again, you never can tell!"

She smiled her gratitude.

"At least," he continued, "you haven't brought your Red Cross kit to bind up anything broken about me. My heart has been in a state where it has needed a bandage since last night. You broke it. If you are Miss Rosalind Franklin out doing charity practice, you might do as much for me as you did for him, considering you broke my heart." Really it wasn't half bad fun, making love to this lovely young creature, even if she were dumb.

She seemed to regard his suggestion, to deliberate over it; the fantastic pictures in the fire held her eyes. Her slim fingers were straightening the glittering little buckles on her girdle.

"I tell you," he started up, suddenly forgetful of her vanishing propensity, "it's dear domesticity for mine — if you'll put your feet on the other side of the fender."

She was fading away. He sank back in his chair.

"Come back," he pleaded; "I'll strap my fool self in this chair. Come back, and tell me what you think of a fireside *à deux*!"

Again she sat on the low stool on the other side of the fire; her pretty feet showed an instant propped up on the shining brass fender. The next moment she swished her skirts over them and stooped to pick up a yellow hairpin that fell from her curls. Her very presence was a heady brew that made the host forget.

"If you don't tell me your name and who sent you to try this psychical experiment on me," he declared, forgetting he must remember, "I'm going to kiss you, Girl!" He grasped empty air. The ghost of the kiss he didn't get mocked him with its echoes. The girl was gone.

"She's like fresh spring water from the mountains," he mused an hour later, when he had given up hope of alluring her back, "after you have been drinking pink lemonade at a circus."

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE MAID REPLIED

“By that, alas ! I plainly see
That nothing lovely is but she ;
And reason captivates me more
Than all my senses did before.”

AT seven the following morning Billy Rutledge, glowing from his cold plunge, was dressed and starting forth for a walk before breakfast. The world in his immediate vicinity wore a new expression. Wonderful adventures were hid even in the windows of prosaic cleaners' shops. The elusive quality of the search feminine had again entered his life ; he was eager for the chase.

“Good morning,” he said, saluting the blue gown with grave levity. “I really feel, don't you know, as if I'd like to bring you roses wet with heaven's dew — or violets — or orchids, but,” — he shrugged his shoulders helplessly and left the sentence unfinished. The gown hung unintelligent. Not even one ripple indicated that it recognized the very good-looking young man who surveyed it with such frank affection from the other side of the window. There was no working the crystal ball this time. Within the shop a slatternly girl was tying

up a box and wrangling with an expressman about something he had failed to call for on yesterday.

Making another beginning, Billy said, "You left me unceremoniously last night." The two within moved nearer the door.

"I'm going to go see if your ring is done," he announced. He remembered the old adage: Pursue a woman and she will flee from you; let her alone and she will pursue you. Anyway, he argued, since the girl of the blue gown appeared and disappeared at her own pleasure, he was as apt to see her at breakfast as he was to catch a glimpse of her here.

"I believe you're in love, Rutledge," Greenville Delancy said, when he joined him over his coffee. "There's a new look to you. I heard an infatuated fellow the other day declaring that Cupid keeps the keys to the spring-house of immortal youth."

"Maybe I am in love," Billy admitted mysteriously. "Pray the gods, Delancy, to give you a drink from the spring. Look up Cupid, old fellow."

The morning mail disposed of at the office, Billy hastened to the Arts and Crafts Society on Nineteenth Street. He found the ring ready to be sent home and took charge of it himself. In giving the order the day before, he had offered to pay twice the usual price if it were executed immediately. He examined the exquisite bit of workmanship critically before he slipped it into

the pocket nearest his heart. The woman who served him saw him turn suddenly as if to greet some one, but no one had entered the place. She fancied she detected a trace of embarrassment in his eyes when he paid her.

Truth to tell, when Billy turned, he knew that the girl in the blue gown had entered the shop; she was close at his side, bending forward to examine the ring while he looked at it. Though she wore the domino of invisibility, he knew she was there. He knew when she bent her head and looked up at him to show him that the stone was near the same shade of blue as her eyes. He hadn't thought of it before, but there were certain turquoise shadows in them. On this point he was undecided. Memory told him her eyes were full of the lights from many jewels, moss agates and turquoises, sapphires and amethysts. There was, he reflected, as he strolled uptown, something about her whole face that was strangely jewel-like. Her hair was full of gold lights, the gleam of the ore newly mined. And when she smiled, it was as if something sparkling had been flashed in that direction.

"There's no doubt about it," and he smiled with amusement at the way she eluded him, "you're in town. Could I prevail on you to come with me to Sherry's for luncheon?"

Apparently he could not. But she walked beside him, now and then straying off to look in this window or that one, much as a child gleefully slips from a path to pick

wayside flowers. Once, on Thirty-fourth Street, an invisible hand was slipped under his arm and he piloted her to safety. The next moment she stood yonder. He knew the very spot where she halted, but apparently she was not there. It was a display of lingerie that had attracted her — foamy little petticoats threaded with faintly tinted ribbons, deliciously foolish and feminine garments, too cobwebby for any but Queen Mab or his girl in the blue gown to wear. Then he lost her again, and found himself in the clutches of Johnston from San Francisco, who began to tell him how dirt cheap land was going in Los Angeles. He was dragged off to a directors' meeting at the Holland House, after which he lunched in a thirty-story office building down-town.

He found a wire from Burke Preston at his office which necessitated his getting in touch with several men who took up the greater part of the afternoon. On the heels of this, Mrs. Matthews, the sister of his partner, wired him to come to dinner, if he wanted to place her under obligations for life. Later she called him up to beg him to break any engagement he might have, for she needed him to fill an empty place at the dinner she was giving to-night. And couldn't he, she wheedled, come with them to the opera afterwards? She'd explain when she saw him, and he needn't stay any longer than he liked. She called him back to the 'phone to remark plaintively that she hoped he wouldn't mind because she

was asking him to fill in. That heaven knew it wasn't because she or anybody else that would be at the dinner really wanted the man who had, at the last moment, gone back on her.

Billy's cheerful laugh reassured her. "Don't ever bother about anything like that, dear Mrs. Matthews," he begged. "I'd die every day in the week for any of your family. I'll come to the dinner." She left the 'phone almost sobbing her gratitude.

The dinner was given for a Miss Saulsbury. Billy played the martyr listening to Mrs. Matthews' asides as the courses progressed. If ever she took on her shoulders again the responsibility of the débutante daughter of an old friend! It was over at last, and they were dropped at the Metropolitan, a spin of twenty seconds in the luxuriously appointed machine of the host. However, Mr. Matthews, grinning amiably, waved his farewells and regrets and left the party at the entrance.

Lohengrin was the bill for the evening, and Billy was rather glad he came. His eyes wandered from tier to tier ablaze with the jewels of the world; lovely women leaned from box and parapet, yet none of all this beauty appealed to him. Above the orchids in the velvet upholstered boxes, his spirit eyes saw a tea-rose face whose purity made these but painted shadows of women. He didn't stay for all of the last act. Mrs. Matthews was so grateful for even that much time she did not press her

invitation for him to go to supper. He hurried out and started for home.

To the right of him and to the left pretty women were pouring out of taxicabs and motors with well-groomed, good-looking escorts. They disappeared into music-haunted cafés where less than a week ago this same young man had been every head waiter's pet. Suppose, he told himself, that the girl in the blue gown had come again and gone! There was something alluringly domestic about the thought of her waiting for him. Her little feet had rested on his bachelor fender; henceforth that fireside would be the home of his affections.

The mystery only added to her charm. He would find her! He would find her! His heart sang comforting assurance that he could do it. He had never yet failed in anything he set out to accomplish. If it took all the rest of his life and all the unminted gold at the bottom of the little "Trust Luck," he would find her — he would find her! The stars far away in the cold December skies twinkled down cheerful assurances that they would help him. The spirit of the night itself, worldly-wise old New York, bade him go in and win. Oh, he would find her!

It had not once occurred to this young man that the blue gown towards which he hurried would one of these days be sent home. When he drew up in front of the cleaner's window and saw in the place where it had lately

hung an unimaginative opera cloak, his heart suddenly went dead ! The shop was closed, the bell broken. No one came in answer to his summons, though he knocked loud and long. He finally told himself with admirable philosophy that this was exactly what any man of common sense might have foreseen. The dress had been sent home !

Well, he would come betimes on the morrow and cross the palm of Louise with gold and from her get the name and address of the girl whose blue gown she had lately cleaned. He was a fool not to have done that to-day. With that clew in hand he knew he could devise some way to meet her. Wasn't heaven itself always on the side of star-crossed lovers ? Oh, he would find her and marry her !

Thus do the gods devise ways to checkmate the plans of mortals, as some novelist of the past decade has already observed. Billy found on reaching his place a telegram from his brother, calling him to the plantation in Mississippi immediately. "Of importance," the message ran. "Business matters. Your advice needed." He decided leisurely that he would leave New York the next afternoon. First, he must attend to the matter of the girl and the blue gown. He could think of no business urgent enough to call him South at once.

He reached for his pipe and settled himself in the big club chair. He hardly dared hope that the girl would

come. She did, with the first puff. Again she was across the hearth from him on the hassock. "Why, hel-lo!" he greeted her as if she were a fond and familiar guest. When he stuck out a friendly hand in her direction she grew dimmer, just as a smoke ring fades. He was immediately seized with penitential regrets for last night.

"By Jove," he told her, fearful that she would fade away before he finished, "I thought I had lost you last night! I really wasn't trying to scare you. Didn't you know it was a joke?" Her jewel eyes reproached him; she plaited the soft folds of her skirt thoughtfully.

"I had to go to a dinner to-night," he said, "and then to the Opera. It wouldn't have been half bad, if you had been along. Why didn't you come?" She shook her head. "And when Elsa wouldn't take the Shining One at his face value," he solemnly knocked the ashes out of his pipe, "and that old duck swam on the scene and carried him away because she was too blamed inquisitive about his last name, my heart had a congestive chill. You left me last night for the same reason, didn't you?"

She plaited her long pink fingers, and made a fence of them through which she went back to her eternal study of the fire.

"A rose by any other name," he continued, "is just as sweet. And it doesn't matter what your name is. You

may be Miss Lohengrin or Miss Rosalind Franklin, or neither; it's all the same so long as you are you. I didn't see last night what it was that came after you, — whether it was a swan or Cinderella's coach, but this was the loneliest place after you vanished! Please don't leave me like that again!"

The fire threw long, quivering shadows to the far corners of the room. The lamp on the table cast its light only on the limited radius of the green cover, the girl crouched near the fire, smiling softly to herself. He took the ring out and told her it was hers. She made no movement to take it, and he dared not try to put it on her finger. He refilled his pipe when she motioned for him to do so.

"If you weren't made out of moonshine and the disembodied spirits of pink roses," he declared, taking a long puff, "you'd probably be making me put this up because the tobacco fumes get in your hair."

She shook her head, lifting her hands to straighten a curl. Once more he looked at her as if to stamp her face on his memory. Her cheek was in purity of curve a child's. Her lips, half parted now, were the redder from contrast to the most pearl-like teeth he had ever seen. A dimple just about deep enough to hold five kisses cleft her chin.

"Why of all people on earth," he demanded, "did you adopt me to torment?" She shook her head.

"It argues a faint interest," he proceeded, "that I am conceited enough to believe I could increase if you would only give me a chance — "

She rose and walked slowly up and down on her side of the room. He watched her with speculative eyes. She was trying to decide something.

"Oh, I say," he began helplessly. "Let's be honest with each other. Sit down!" She sank down obediently on the footstool. "Come on," he begged, "I'll start your confession for you. You've been taking a correspondence course in some school where they teach these interesting things, — coming through keyholes, vanishing through the floor, clothing yourself in invisibility. Haven't you?" Then, not waiting for her to speak, "You've taken your diploma, and there isn't any reason why you shouldn't use your witchcraft, now that you know how to manage a broomstick." He was elated with his astuteness. It didn't seem to impress her especially. "I am not sure what in your case these accomplishments are called," he proceeded. "You may be known as a student of the psychical, or again you may have a cheap license to practice on the vaudeville stage. Now I," regretfully, "don't even know the alphabet of a card trick. My experience goes no further than two performances of Anna Eva Fay and odd Hermann exhibitions."

He had stopped in the hope that she would encourage

him by agreeing with him or disagreeing. Her interest was purely that of a listener.

"Can you," he gayly demanded, "take a white rabbit out of a silk hat?" He reached for his opera hat and put it discreetly halfway between them. "That has always been my favorite problem in the realm of improbabilities. Did you get that far?"

She waved her lovely hands in pantomime over the hat, but no rabbit came up; she seemed as disappointed as he at its non-appearance.

"I know just how you feel," he comforted, "like kids do when they find they can't fly. Didn't you use to think you could?"

She nodded delightedly. Her eyes held reminiscences. She almost spoke.

"Another trick that has been the despair of my maturer years, though I first saw it when a child," he continued, "is breaking eggs into a frying pan, covering it up on the fire, then removing the lid to let out a flock of white pigeons. Can you do that?"

She contemplated the toe of her slipper as if she were trying to remember if that were in her repertoire.

"If a chafing dish could be substituted for the homely frying pan I saw used in the Grand Opera House out in Golden, Colorado," he said, "I think there is one about here somewhere. And I could get some eggs, if you'd guarantee to materialize the squabs!"

No, she shook her head; that was beyond her also.

"Come on," he persisted. "Anna Eva made a handkerchief follow her like a dog on a string all over the stage. We certainly ought to be able to do that. Let's try." Whipping a handkerchief from his pocket, he caught it in the center, trying to make it stand on its four corners. It fell in a supine heap.

"That's queer," he said, puckering his brows; "she made a flabby silk handkerchief stand on its hind legs and walk all over the stage after her. I can't seem to do it. Can you?"

The girl produced from the recesses of her girdle a handkerchief like a cobweb, and bending over, tried to put it through the paces he had attempted. It refused to take even the first position.

"The trouble with yours," he suggested, talking down to her, for she bent over the filmy square until her face was below the level of the fire, "is that it hasn't any backbone." He craned his neck trying to decipher the vine-encircled monogram in the corner. "Your handkerchief hasn't. Now mine is linen and stiff enough to stand alone if it weren't too stubborn." Again he essayed the foolish trick. "Come on," he whistled pleadingly. "Right this way!"

The girl shrugged her shoulders and went back to her former interest in the fire.

"It doesn't in the least matter," he remarked, going

back to his earlier fears, "who you are — if I only had some idea where you are. I tell you, though, my heart felt like crawling off somewhere and starving to death when you did that disappearing stunt last night. I know how Elsa felt when the swan came for Lohengrin —"

She reached for the poker and stirred the fire into a leaping blaze.

"I'm not going to move," he declared, "but I just want you to understand now and forever you are the only girl in the world for me. I swear until I meet you in the flesh I will never look at another girl to love her. I'm tired of this life I've been leading, this aimless existence. I want — you!" He stopped short. He had not meant to say it in this way. "I'd make you happy," he pleaded helplessly, trying to remember he mustn't move — he mustn't move.

Was she about to speak! No, she was going to sing.

She stretched a slim foot to the blaze, and drew nearer the fire. Her beauty would have galvanized a dead man to life as she sang the foolish old song of the girl in Mother Goose:

"The little Maid replied,

(Some say she sighed)

'But what will we have to eat, eat, eat?

Will the love you're so rich in

Make a fire in the kitchen

Or the little gods of love turn the spit, spit, spit?"

She buried her chin in her hands, convulsed with merriment over her own performance. He didn't know she could sing! He didn't know it! It was much as a small girl taunts a schoolboy. Her face mocked and allured him; she swung a slipper back and forth, still laughing at him, sitting over there helpless and afraid of her.

"You've got a voice like red roses." He sank back heroically, when she grew dim as he turned toward her. "Sing something else."

"Will the love you're so rich in
Make a fire in the kitchen?"

she demanded, with renewed interest.

"I should say," he bragged. "Don't you know I'm rich as cream? I've got a gold mine out West just to dig money out of for you to spend. You know what a kitchen is? You know how to cook?"

She held up her two hands like flowers.

"I'd like to see a biscuit you made," he teased. His remarks were interrupted by the arrival of a messenger boy. It was another telegram — from his brother's wife this time, requesting him to take the next train South. Bob was ill.

The girl had disappeared. No amount of persuasion could bring her back. A faint fragrance lingered about the place where she had been. It was like plum blossoms after a spring rain.

"Now what the deuce did I do," Billy reproached himself impatiently, "to make her leave me like that?"

He looked up his train and found that it left at a quarter to seven the next morning. Then he wrote instructions out for Wilkes, the confidential clerk in his office, wired to Burke Preston and to Bob, his brother, that he would leave in a few hours for the South, after which he turned in and tried to sleep.

He fell into a fitful doze towards morning and overslept himself. He sprang up and dressed in haste. About the blue gown first! The cleaner's shop was not open. He wasted more of his precious time in the vain hope that Louise would appear, but she did not. It was twenty minutes to seven as he dashed up Broadway in a cab. He had barely time to make his train.

CHAPTER IV

THE OTHER GIRL

“When fond of power, of beauty vain
Her nets she spread for every swain,
I strove to hate, but vainly strove;
Tell me, my heart, if this be love.”

—GEORGE, LORD LYTTTELTON.

WHEN William Rutledge changed trains at Washington, the sole occupant of the sleeper rushing southward, besides himself, was a girl. The fact that she was a girl did not interest him. He was deeply absorbed in thoughts of the dream maiden he had left behind him in New York, so much so that the several calls for luncheon did not arouse him to the needs of his body. A solicitous waiter finally importuned him to have something to eat, and once in the dining car he made a very good meal indeed. Returning, he almost ran into the young woman in the sleeper. He started back in embarrassment. Their eyes met. He quickly put it down to a disordered imagination, but — he could have sworn at the minute —

The fleeting glimpse of his fellow-traveler as he ducked low, begging her pardon, telegraphed him what he dismissed the same second as absurd, that here in the flesh

stood the lady of his dreams. He even fancied that he caught in the tail of her eye a lurking gleam of recognition, — half a temptation to speak to him, suddenly abandoned. No, — she was looking the other way, deeply absorbed in the flying panorama of sky and wooded hillside. He passed on to his section and went straight back to his thoughts, which took this direction :

“See here, old chap, you’re in love and more or less a lunatic, — rather more, I should say, just now. When a man’s in love he sees in every woman he meets his sweetheart’s likeness, just as a drunkard thinks the whole world is intoxicated. This affair happened along just as you were in the mood for loving, as the lady writers in the yellow journals put it, and everything you see in the divine mold of woman you invest with wonder and charm which the original probably does not possess. Now you are spiritually bound to that blue gown girl in New York and it is to her your thoughts are exclusively dedicated. Don’t look at that girl yonder. You never saw her before. Probably you’ll never see her again after you leave this car.”

He didn’t glance in that direction until late in the afternoon. He watched her coming down the aisle. She wore a gray gown and black furs; the latter she had thrown about her when the train slowed up to take water at the station they had just passed. She had gone outside to walk up and down on the station platform. Billy

himself had at that moment felt a desperate need of fresh air, but he gritted his teeth and doggedly kept his place. Now he couldn't well altogether close his eyes when she was coming down the aisle towards him. It would look too idiotic. Her ears were pink; her eye-lashes long and bronze tinted. The profile of her face was exquisite. Really, she was beautiful, he decided as he studied her reflection in a mirror at the other end of the car. He finally pulled his eyes away from the glass and plunged gloomily back into a dime magazine he was trying to read. Inwardly he cursed his brother for calling him South.

At breakfast the following morning she sat at the table across the aisle from him. She was slim, and in her close-fitting gown of gray without the coat, she was even more girlish and charming than he had thought her the day before. Her bronze hair shone in the morning sunshine. Her very presence irradiated the whole car. Half a dozen waiters enviously watched the lucky one who brought her breakfast and who took her order for all the morning papers. She was the incarnation of the morning itself, its youth and beauty; full of glad freshness to find another day even better than yesterday to dispose of; and as such not one of the passengers, gray-haired men and their middle-aged wives, drummers talking over "making" this town or that one, and the gaping occupants from the day coach indulging in a

good breakfast to offset the economy of a sleepless night, withheld her the meed of their admiration. She lingered over her grapefruit, devouring the headlines in the paper propped up against the sugar bowl. Billy idly wondered what her name was; where she was going. Yes, he even speculatively allowed his mind to wonder with whom she was in love. Girls like this were always in love with somebody, and everybody was in love with them.

At luncheon he threw a bone to his sentimental conscience by explaining to it that he only waited until she went into the dining car because he didn't happen to feel hungry until that moment himself. Then he added that he found pleasure in watching her covertly only because in some vague way she reminded him of his sweetheart, whose name he didn't even know. He had no explanation or apology to make for his ridiculous irritation when he observed in passing her section that she had two immense boxes of bon-bons and several dozen American Beauties with stems long enough to reach from the window out across the aisle. A thorn from one of these laid a detaining claw on his coat in passing; he freed himself haughtily, though he afterwards did penance for his sullenness by remembering she had started to speak to him. Maybe she would have got the thorn out herself if he only waited a moment. After the porter had put the flowers in fresh water, she busied herself — he could

see very well in the mirror — pulling off and throwing away the withered petals. He resolved in sudden self-disgust that he would move into another car. The journey was nearly at an end, anyway. He spent the remainder of the day moodily in the smoker. He couldn't forget, however, at what hours she ate, neither could he keep his thoughts from speculating on what she was ordering this time. But he adhered to his resolution to avoid her. He took another table at the end of the car, an hour after she should have finished. Even then she swept past him, so close her gown almost brushed his sleeve; and he ate her up hungrily with his eyes, as she disappeared into the Pullman.

She continued her brisk walks up and down, whenever the train halted long enough for her to get out for the air. Billy couldn't help watching her from his window. At Atlanta a lot of people took possession of her. A very pretty young matron whom the others called "Polly" was begging her to come on and go home with her now. Three personable young men, each of whom seemed to have brought some offering, added their individual persuasions to Mrs. Polly's. Billy also observed that each of the young men tried in vain to get a word with the girl while the others weren't looking. It gave him a ridiculous feeling of satisfaction to observe that she very carefully avoided a tête-à-tête with any one of them. She was declaring that it was quite impossible for her

to stop over this time in Atlanta. Somebody — Billy strained his ears to catch the name — was expecting her, was going to send to the station for her to-night. No, she couldn't wire.

"All aboard," the conductor called to the group.

Billy couldn't decide what it was they had called her. It was something that sounded like "Cissy." But her name didn't interest him, he reminded himself, with a forced yawn. Not in the least. If he really had been curious to find out what it was, there had been more than one opportunity. An excellent one had presented itself when a novel she was reading slipped on the floor and she hurried out for one of her constitutionals. He knew her name was written in it, for his eye had caught the superscription on the fly-leaf. But the porter had restored the book to its owner. Whatever book it was, she wasn't particularly interested in it, that was very apparent.

Now the train was flying through the smaller towns he had known from infancy; through a country beautiful to him for its early associations. His eyes wandered from the far, blue mountains in the distance at the foot of which mining towns nestled, veiled in a penitential cloud of soot and smoke from the iron foundries and smelteries. Now they crossed a limpid river, on the shores of which shanty boats were tied up for the winter. He was getting home. He could smell the fried chicken

his native land hawked under the windows, and he bought hot, withered bunches of wild violets from a moon-eyed pickaninny simply to get them out of an alien hand. The chicken sandwiches harmonized with their vendors; the violets did not.

Just before his station was called, down in Mississippi, Billy dozed off for an afternoon nap. He was dreaming about the girl in the blue gown, that she was telling him she was only a joke, when the porter's hand on his shoulder wakened him. "Heah's Bayside, boss," he addressed, "wake up, suh! De train jes slowed up. We late now." He was leading the way out with Billy's luggage.

The little station named for the family plantation was just as Billy remembered it. There was the same station agent, shock-headed and garrulous, now assisted by his son. And there, waiting for him, was Pomp, the white-headed old butler who had been with his grandfather before him. The carriage was as rickety as ever. The same wiry little ponies, "Henry Clay" and "Dan'ul Webster," pawed the ground and sniffed at the rising storm. Pomp bowed with prodigious pride.

"Sarvent, Marse Billy," his rich old voice welcomed. "Heah I is wid de kerridge ter meet you, suh!" Various old friends of the neighborhood, farmers loafing about the village store, added their greetings. The station-agent left unheeded the clicking telegraph instrument to tell if it were snowing up North when he left.

"Aixcuse me, suh," the old negro began, scratching his head, "I done clean furgot in my pride ur seein' you, suh, whut Miss Clothilde she say. Dat Miss Cissy gwine be in dis train mebbe huh-se'f. Yonder she is now!" — hurrying off in the direction of the station.

Billy Rutledge's eyes fairly bulged from his head. There, standing by a small mountain of traveling bags, florist's boxes and odd packages that he recognized as bon-bon receptacles, stood the girl from whom he had fled on the train. His heart had the bit in its teeth, running away with him. He was ridiculously excited over something. Then the next moment he ground his heel into the soft red clay under foot and cursed his stars for the complications that lay before him. For the first time in his life he meekly confessed that he was made from dust, and that any wind strong enough to sway a pretty woman's petticoat could blow him whithersoever it listeth.

"Dis heah's Marse Billy Rutledge," Pomp performed the ceremony grandiloquently. "And dis heah is Miss Cissy, Marse Billy." The girl held out a slim, gray-gloved hand and laughed deliciously.

"Mr. Rutledge," she murmured, "I am Cecilia Dalrymple. You see," as he did not achieve anything more gallant than a bow, "I remember you!" Her voice held a reproach as she searched the depths of a gold purse for her checks. What he might have replied was lost in Pomp's sudden agitation over the weather.

"Y'all git in on de back seat," he commanded, storing the baggage where it would fit in best and quickest; "hit's gwine po' down a Noah's Ark storm. I gotter git you home fo' dat crick rises. De bridge done washed away." He was busy buckling on side-curtains and handing them tarpaulins and lap robes against the time of need. In the west the clouds justified his forebodings. It grew darker and more lowering. Lightning zig-zagged, and a cutting wind had risen. It whined about the carriage, trying to lift the curtains. Pomp, everything at last being trig and secure, crawled to his driver's seat and cut the ponies sharply. They were off.

"I gotter outrun it," he announced, as if he were himself hitched to the carriage. "De ain't no hoss dat kin ford dat crick when she gits on er rampage."

"That's right, Pomp," Billy encouraged. "Let them go!"

"Dey gwine," was the laconic rejoinder. The first heavy drops of rain spattered on the top of the carriage. "Hit's been gittin' ready fer dis," Pomp announced. "I knowed er storm uz comin'. Hit's been spittin' rain er week. Das er sign dat doan nevah fail —"

Now they had turned out of the village street into the road leading to the plantation. It was growing darker and the wind flapped the tarpaulins with sudden energy. Ninety-nine out of a hundred people under

the circumstances would have remarked on the weather. But apparently neither of the two on the back seat knew it was raining. Billy did not. He was trying to get his mind to congeal into something definite. The world was whirling at a terrific speed, everything seemed to be thrown out of socket. He was telling himself desperately that he must remember, must remember —

"I wasn't quite sure," the girl murmured about this time, "but I thought I recognized you when you got on at Washington."

He was, for the moment, too astonished to reply. Could it be, after all, that the girl in the blue gown was sitting beside him in the flesh?

"Yes," he said tremulously, "once I fancied you were going to speak to me. Why didn't you?"

She was sitting so close, crowded as they were, that her arm touched his when the carriage gave a sudden lurch. Her very presence, soft and warm and fragrant, added to the confusion of his heart, to the intoxication that was in process in his brain.

"I didn't," she said, after a while, "because I hardly thought you would remember. It has been so long since you saw me —"

"It has been several million years," he agreed happily, "since last night. But it would take even longer than that to make me forget — you." He must go

slow, he kept saying to himself. He felt for words as a blind man gropes for chairs to lead him where he wants to go. For all he knew she might disappear at any moment. The tangible evidence that she was there, — her bags and boxes, her trunk strapped on behind, — all these might vanish even as she had disappeared on two former occasions. This girl seemed to be real, but the one last night, until she faded away, had been quite as much a creature of flesh and blood.

"Since last night?" she replied, bewildered. "Now I know you don't know me!" He suddenly decided that he must be going crazy. Something in her tone suggested the idea to him.

"Yes, since last night," he repeated. "You know colors seen by candlelight don't look the same by day. Then I had seen you only in an evening gown. You are different in gray and furs." Somehow his tongue halted in talking to her. Previously he had found the very ease that he felt towards her one of her potential charms.

"Mr. Rutledge," a cold little voice recalled him to a world of conventions, "do you know how many years it has been since Bob and Clothilde married?"

"Ten," he replied, "or eight, maybe." The sudden digression restored him like a dash of cold water. "Why?"

"Well, it's exactly ten years since I saw you. I

never flattered myself that you saw me at all." Her laughter was like a chime of silver bells.

No man could be prepared for a situation like the one confronting Billy Rutledge at this juncture. He wasn't so sure that after all he wasn't sitting on the back seat by himself.

"It does seem ten years," he heard himself reply. "Did you leave New York on the same train with me? I didn't see you."

The girl regarded him with eyes that wondered even in the twilight if her companion had lost his senses. "I've never been in New York in my life," she replied coldly. "I saw you at Bob's and Clothilde's wedding. You were the best man; I was one of the six flower girls."

"Oh!" he gasped. "I see!"

"Though you've grown several feet since then," she pleasantly continued, "I recognized you—or thought I did. I knew you didn't have the faintest recollection of me."

"Indeed," he began—

"Indeed, nothing," she anticipated. "You might as well own up. You took me for some one else. Didn't you?"

"You are rather like a girl I know."

"A New York girl?" she persisted.

"I'm sure I don't know," he replied. "But you do look something alike."

"At Clothilde's wedding," his companion babbled gaily on, "you were the only man present who hadn't handled me on his knee when I was an infant. You didn't suspect it then, but I broke my eight-year-old heart praying for you to notice me. You didn't have eyes," impressively, "for anybody but Gertrude Francis. To think," again the tinkling waterfall of a laugh, "you didn't marry her, after all."

"I don't even remember what she looked like," he confessed gracelessly.

"Well, at that time I was crazy to have some one all in love with me," she continued. "I wanted to do everything Clothilde did. A flower girl isn't anything at a wedding but part of the Greek chorus with the preacher and the ushers —"

"And the bridegroom," he supplemented quietly. "You were one of the flower girls —"

"I was the one who fell down and got tangled up in Clothilde's train," she admitted. "Now can't you remember me?"

"I've got you at last," he rejoined; "you left your partner and clung to Bob's hand going down the aisle —"

"And everybody in church," she interpolated, "heard him tell me I was trying to get the center of the stage from Clothilde."

Billy roared. "I remember it all now," he said, "how they teased you afterwards at the reception —"

"You didn't," she flashed gratefully. "I think maybe that's the reason I have remembered you all these years."

The five-mile drive to Bayside was not a long one to the two on the back seat of the old carriage. The rain had almost stopped, and the wind came through the pine trees with the freshness of the woods. From the side from which Pomp had lifted the tarpaulin they could see the stars hanging low, the big, soft, Southern stars peeping out from behind the cover of a gray cloud blanket. An owl hooted lonesomely along after the carriage.

Now that they stood on solid ground, two creatures of the same world, almost kin to each other, the conversation easily took care of itself. She was telling him that she had been visiting in Washington and Virginia since October and now she was on her way to spend Christmas with Bob and Clothilde. "You know," she was saying, "since I left the convent two years ago, I have made my home with them. Didn't you know that Clothilde was a step-aunt of mine, my nearest living relative?" The relation was explained when he remembered Clothilde's Creole ancestry. A cousin is always "my dear cousin" to the twentieth generation in New Orleans. A step-aunt he presumed would be a tie even more binding.

Now they had reached the "hammock" and it was

growing darker. The rain, except for an occasional splash, had ceased. Pomp was urging the ponies to "keep it up a lil longer." They were running with their noses to the ground, like dogs. His companion wondered what time it was. Billy could not see in the recesses of the dark where they sat, but he struck a match. As it flared up, he looked at his watch and at his companion; he had a sudden impatience to see her face again.

How could he have made so foolish a mistake as to have confused her with any one he had ever seen? He knew now the resemblance that had haunted him was the memory of her as a child. In putting his watch back into his pocket, his finger touched something hard. It seemed to slip toward his hand and grasp the tip of his finger. It was the blue ring for his dream-girl sweetheart. And here he was, two days and a half later, on the verge of making love to another girl.

He couldn't deny it, this girl by his side had in the last hour made him forget he was sorry he had been called South. He wasn't any more. Her limpid eyes had drowned the pledge he had made to another pair of blue eyes. Here, close to this girl, his memory of the dream maiden was fading even as she had faded. He gripped the blue ring with savage determination. It was the one tie that bound him to the girl he left behind him. He would not be wax at the first temptation. He had even forgotten to inquire after his sick brother,

under the charm of Miss Cecilia Dalrymple's gay chatter. He moved valiantly farther away, his hand still gripping the ring.

"Pomp," he asked suddenly, "did you leave your Marse Bob better?"

"Who? Marse Bob — bettah?" said Pomp, bewildered. "He ain't been sick, Marse Billy."

"Yes, I think he has," he replied, in tones that to another would have admitted of no argument. "I came home because he is sick."

"Dey ain't tole me nuthin' erbout it, den," Pomp persisted. "Ef Marse Bob is sick, I ain't never seed sich er strappin' lookin' inverlid. Dey ain't nobody ever gits sick on dis place, Marse Billy, 'cep'n me when I gits on my spree ev'ry Chris'mus. Dat allus gives me er mis'ry in my haid 'bout er week atterwards!" Pomp guffawed softly at recollection of former Yuletide dissipations.

Cecilia Dalrymple was leaning out of the carriage; the curtains had now been taken down. They had turned into the parklike grove about the big house. Through the distant trees glowed a broad stream of light from the front doors of Bayside. On the steps, as the carriage rolled up the graveled drive, were Bob and Clothilde, half a dozen children with twice that many long-eared hounds and bird dogs at their feet, impatiently calling to Pomp to "whip up the ponies."

CHAPTER V

WHO IS CISSY?

"Who is Sylvia? What is she
That all our swains commend her?"

— SHAKESPEARE.

THE old place was unchanged. The big white house hadn't even been painted in the years he had been away from home. The dogs were those he had left when he went West. Even his own bird dog, "General Jackson," now fifteen years old! Billy had seen Bob several times in the intervening years, but not Clothilde. It was hard to realize that the slim child in white satin he had seen last under the misty veil when she married his brother could be this billowy matron of twenty-eight. Ten years does make a difference.

About her were grouped six children, from Little Bob, who was nine, to a pink baby in her arms. Clothilde had slumped into motherhood without one regretful glance back toward the brief butterfly existence she led the season before she married. Where once she thought only of dress, now her comfort came first. But withal she was as blooming as a rose and as voluble in French and English as the convent girl Bob brought away from New Orleans to be mistress of Bayside.

Clothilde's housekeeping was as easy-going as herself. Her philosophy of life might be summed up in a nutshell. It anticipated all "Don't Worry" clubs and put into practical execution the line of reasoning they have spread abroad. In her case matters over which other women might have worried themselves into wrinkles or induced premature gray hairs trying to solve, were turned with absolute confidence that he could make them right, over to her husband. "Ask Bob" was her solution to all perplexities that offered themselves to her.

What had she to worry over? With Mammy in the nursery, where she had patted and rocked and dosed the family babies for fifty years, and Aunt 'Ria who had reigned in the kitchen about as long, with a dozen little negroes under these to do their bidding, life to Clothilde slipped by, a succession of sunny days, and Bob was quite as much in love with her as when she became his soft-eyed young Creole bride.

True, the house, like Clothilde herself, to a methodical person, would have given the impression of being very much down at the heels, but its lord and master saw it only as home, the place where he was comfortable; and the radiance that illumined the whole plantation was the cheerfulness of its mistress. Everything about Bayside bespoke a quiet content, a happiness that brooded over the plantation and projected itself into the lowliest negro cabin.

Bob had not been ill. But in the confusion of welcoming the two arrivals and getting them into the house, Billy did not remark on this. It was enough to see his brother, big, brown, and handsome, hurrying out to greet him, to feel the resounding, welcoming whack on his back; and the next moment he was the center of a *mêlée* of babies, dogs, and little niggers scurrying past him, conveying his traps and those of the girl into the house.

Clothilde was kissing him in the most sisterly fashion and reproaching him because he had stayed away so long. "I sent the telegram," she anticipated his question. "Bob would really have been very ill if you hadn't come. So should I — of sheer disappointment. It was only the thought of your coming," she added, her arms about his companion of the drive, "that saved him from a hard spell."

Billy was bewildered by the apologetic look on his brother's face. Clothilde had taken possession of the girl guest; all the children hung enraptured about her, while she explained she had brought them loads of candy. Followed by the troop of nursery citizens, the dogs, and small black satellites carrying her bags and parcels, Cissy with Clothilde disappeared upstairs.

It was very pleasant to be at home again, Billy told himself, as he dressed for the Southern supper. He would make the best of whatever had brought him.

Anyway, he couldn't understand how he had stayed away so long. It was good to be back among his own people. It was nice to think his fellow-traveler was going to be here several months. How long did she say she was going to stay? Then he remembered, and came down with cruel force on his black hair that really didn't deserve such efforts to make it lie as it had been trained, close to his finely modeled head.

As he brushed it savagely at the old-fashioned bureau, right over his shoulder — he whirled, and the reflection vanished — was the tantalizing reproachful face of the girl in the blue gown! At any rate, he felt that it would have been reproachful, if he had seen it clearly. She knew! She knew already how his heart of wax was melting under another girl's soft eyes. It wasn't! Then he came down with another savage whack.

This girl downstairs, whoever she was, wasn't in the least like his dream-girl sweetheart. Now that he had time to think it over, he saw she wasn't. We often see resemblances in strangers that disappear when we come to know them better. It had been so in this case. He would show this Miss Cissy that he was made of sterner stuff than her previous admirers. He would show her!

Again in the mirror was reflected the dream-girl's face. In her curls she wore a little knot of blue. He could drink in the faint fragrance from her hair, she was so close to him. He did not turn, for fear the reflection would

vanish. Even now he knew why she became so shadowy. "I swear," he whispered in renewal of his vow, "that you are the only girl in the world for me. Don't leave me —" His love-making was interrupted by Pomp's formal announcement that supper was ready. She had already disappeared.

It was ridiculously inconsistent of him, after steeling his heart against his fellow-guest, to be distinctly disappointed when she did not appear at the table. Clothilde explained that Cissy was tired, that she had gone to bed. She, too, disappeared immediately after supper in the direction of Cissy's room, and the two brothers were left free to talk business.

Bob smoked on, dwelt on bird dogs and politics, the boll weevil and the climate out West. Finally Billy knocked the ashes out of his pipe and turned to his brother. "Look here, Bob," he demanded, "it's getting on to ten o'clock; what's all this mystery, anyway? You've got me here to act in an important business deal for you, and you haven't come within five thousand miles of any business to-night. Buck up and tell me what it's all about!"

"Why this haste?" Bob drawled. "You've got that infernal Yankee habit of hurry-it-through, I see."

"I left an important affair in New York," Billy replied; "something that bears on my immediate future, to come to your rescue. Out with it! What is the deal

in which I'm to act for you? And I must say," — critically surveying the other's glowing countenance, on which health and happiness were writ large, "you don't look like a man who needs his will written soon."

Bob laughed. "You're right," he agreed, "I've never been better in my life. To make a clean breast of the whole thing — but I swore not to — Clothilde, as she told you, sent those telegrams. We all wanted you to come home. There isn't any business trouble. I made more money this year than I ever did before, in spite of the panicky times up North. Clothilde wanted you, — a little scheme of hers. She wired before she told me; then I weakly agreed to stand halfway responsible, so she sent the second message."

"Cut that short," Billy said with brusque tenderness; "you and Clothilde know I'm yours to command. Everything I've got — and I am getting disgustingly rich out of that worked-out mine — is at your disposal. If it's money —"

"But it isn't," the other hastily interrupted. "Hang it all, I can't tell you. Wait and see!"

"Man alive," Billy objected, "I can't hang around on the chance of finding out what child's game you and Clothilde are playing. I've got business in New York that demands my immediate attention. What is it, Bob? You might as well tell me."

"It sounds so devilish foolish for me to tell," Bob

stopped short. "And I am under oath not to, but the fact is, Clothilde has a matrimonial scheme hatched up in which you are to be the bridegroom. She's got the whole thing planned out, even to the gown she is going to wear. She wants you to get married, m-a-r-r-i-e-d. To have an old-time wedding here at Bayside,—festivities for a week,—get you settled down, my boy!"

"I might as well tell you," Billy replied, when he had recovered his breath from the surprise his brother's words gave him, "I am already engaged. Didn't you know it?"

It was the other's turn to be surprised.

"Funny I forgot to mention it," Billy smiled complacently.

"Never mind her name or anything about her. Hang it!" as Bob looked injured at his lack of brotherly confidence, "it's all right, old man." He refilled his pipe. "I'd tell you — if — er — she'd let me talk about it yet."

"Better look out," Bob grunted suspiciously; "if she's taken that tone, your engagement is liable to be terminated any moment. I know something about that kind of engagement."

Billy strode up and down the room. "You don't happen to know anything about the girl I'm engaged to," he boasted. "I'd tell you our plans and everything; but the fact is, your telegram came just before we fixed

things up. You see, if this is all that you wanted with me, to get me settled down, I'll speak to Clothilde myself, and tell her how impossible her plans are."

"No, you won't!" Bob emphatically informed him. "Didn't you understand I broke an oath when I let you in on the ground floor? Anyway, it was bound to be a fizzle, Clothilde's plan was. She wouldn't have you," surveying his younger brother critically.

"Who wouldn't have me?"

"Cissy."

"Was—er—she the bride imported for my benefit?" asked Billy, with elaborate nonchalance. The idea was not unpleasing to him; he only mentally regretted a previous engagement. Maybe these thoughts photographed themselves on the other's mind, for Bob rose from his chair and gave Billy another sound slap on the shoulder on his way to the decanter.

"Who are you," he observed with deep amusement "and what, that Cissy Dalrymple would have you?" He continued to appraise the personal good points of his brother. "Why, she's got more men in love with her now than six ordinary girls could handle. She's a flirt from the crown of her shining yellow head to the sole of her silly little slippers, and she wouldn't look at you—for a husband." He was seized with another gale of laughter as he offered a glass to Billy.

"She'd better wait until I ask her," was Billy's savage

ply, as he drained his glass. "I don't believe I have given her reason to think she will have to soften a rejection for me — yet." He relapsed into gloomy silence.

Bob crossed over and held out his hand. "Forgive me, old man," he said. "It's all a joke about Cissy. She doesn't dream what Clothilde's plans are, or she would oppose them more strenuously than you are doing. About this other, though; it's all right if I am not to be let into your secret just now. But you won't misunderstand if I ask you one question? She, this girl you're engaged to, isn't an actress, is she? You know we old-timers haven't come yet to the place where we can with good grace stand for actresses in Mississippi — except on the stage."

It was Billy's turn to roar.

"All women are actresses," he replied with worldly wisdom, "but the girl I am going to marry isn't on the stage." He stopped short. How did he know? She wasn't of the actress type. If Fate had placed her behind the footlights, the artificial life had not robbed her of the dewdrop charm of innocence. "She never even went to a matinee by herself," he heard himself add. "I say — an actress! You'll adore her, old man." He straightened up proudly. "Why, she's made a man of me already, and I haven't even seen her!"

"Haven't seen her?" the other's chin dropped incredulously.

"Er — that — is," the engaged man floundered, "I haven't seen her since your telegram came calling me South. Didn't even have time to say good-by."

"But you wired her, of course," the thoughtful married man said. "Keep your own counsel, my boy. I'm mighty glad she is that kind of a girl. I've always been a believer in our old Southern theory that a girl with a pedigree is a safe risk. And, of course, you know all about her people —"

"Of course," inanely echoed Billy. "The whole family's all right."

"Blood will tell, whatever you say." Bob was mounted on his favorite hobby now; it made Billy wince for the first time. It was all well enough for him to marry the girl of his dream even as she stepped from the dream, knowing naught and asking nothing about those who came before her. Away from the South no such silly consideration as family had entered his thoughts of her.

"She's a princess; you'll know it when you see her," he said, as much to convince himself of the wisdom of his choice as to interrupt his brother's reminiscences.

"Don't, for Heaven's sake," Bob entreated a few minutes later, "give Clothilde an inkling I have let you in on the matrimonial cake she has been mixing for you. I'll hint it to her offhand that you are already engaged that it's in the up-in-the-air stage as yet. But you can

ay a week, can't you? She'll be reconciled, and we'll
ass the whole matter off that you came down to hunt.
can convince even Clothilde of the advantages of let-
ng you pick out your own sweetheart. She just wants
ou to get married to somebody, old man!"

"And I'll listen to her dissertations on matrimony,"
illy agreed, refilling his pipe, "and break it to her gently
at I am not on the market. Tell me about this young
erson, though — this fascinating Cissy. Who is she?"

"Cecilia Dalrymple, some relation — I've never fig-
red out what — to Clothilde, who loves her as if she were
younger sister. She's almost like one of our own chil-
ren. She was at the convent in New Orleans until she
ade her début two years ago; since then, when she
asn't been with relatives in Washington or New Orleans,
visiting any of her dear five hundred girl friends all
er the country, she stays here with us. We are the
st-cure she takes when the world of men gets too much
r her. She's usually engaged to four or five, I believe.
deduce this from what she doesn't tell me — and what
e poor devils who follow her here do tell me — for
hen these various strings to her bow get tangled, she
ts the whole lot of 'em and comes to us — to rest up —"

"Trial engagements," Billy smiled absently, remem-
ring the three men who met her in Atlanta.

"Be glad you are engaged," the other felicitated.
We are all devoted to her. She is absolutely innocent

of a desire to cause unhappiness when she engages herself to this man or that one. I have figured it out she really intends to marry somebody — some day. Clothild is trying to hasten the day and get her settled down, too. But I tell you, the man who tries to domesticate Cissy Dalrymple has my sympathy. You see, she has done as she sweetly damn-pleased so long! You let her alone that's my advice to any man. It's worse than fooling with fire — to think that you can flirt with Cissy Dalrymple —”

“Who's thinking of flirting with her?” Billy demanded, with sudden irritation.

“Have you seen this last issue of the *Review of Reviews*?” Bob digressed amicably — “what the President says about the Panama Canal?”

CHAPTER VI

AN OLD SONG

"The dawn should be gay with the song of birds,
And the stir of fluttering wings.
Surely the joy of life is hid
In simple and tender things!"

— LAURENCE HOPE.

BILLY might have profited by the excellent counseling of his brother to let Cissy alone, in the days that followed, if he had perceived any danger. As it was, Miss Calrymple treated him with such unstudied friendliness, such an absence of all effort to charm him, that he was conquered, and attracted to her in spite of himself; he speculatively wondered what she thought of him. Apparently, she had other things to occupy her mind. The children took up most of her time.

She was foolish about them; Cissy and the children pervaded the place. Oftentimes he came upon her in the fields with the five who were large enough to walk trailing at her heels in search of belated wild flowers. "sweet gum," always accompanied by his old dog, General Jackson. He had rather expected to find her a lazy little person who would not make her appearance before noon, after the traditional habits of society belles.

On the contrary, she was the first one down in the morning, and often said good night when the children's bedtime came at eight o'clock.

Cissy had very little time for him, but she never was too busy to do anything the children wanted her to do.

The small Brer Rabbit, christened William after him and nicknamed by Mammy in the nursery, was always at her heels. It was Cissy who made a tent for the back-yard circus; it was Cissy who had to be called in for consultation when the red bird refused to come back to the dining-room window to get his after breakfast crumbs. Oh, Cissy knew how to whistle him back! It was Cissy who had charmed the cardinals until the whole family of them were as tame as parrots and quite as full of chatter.

Billy felt a miserable twinge, almost like jealousy, because General Jackson had transferred his devotion to the girl. In the old days General Jackson had eyes only for him, as now he had eyes only for Cissy.

And Cissy, when all was told, was only an irresponsible, loving child herself. Even if she were too engrossed with the many absorbing things about the plantation to waste her sweet looks on Billy, — the same sweet looks were withheld from nothing else on the place. For hers was the pervading affection that spills over, and diffused, brings back to the giver twice as much as she herself gives, heaped down and running over. Bob smiled and waited.

Oh, he knew her. He knew her !

More than once coming from the fields on that side of the house, Billy had dismounted at the steps of the back gallery, and through the undrawn curtains of a window in the end of the hall watched a picture of domestic charm, with Cissy as its center. It was rather hard to remember what Bob had told him about her being a flirt when he beheld her seated before the great fire in the hall, the children grouped about her, the baby's head pillowed on her shoulder, while she sang to them such foolish nonsense that they screamed with laughter.

It was only by holding very tightly to the memory of his dream-girl sweetheart that he succeeded in reducing to nothingness an air castle that was, in spite of his determination not to let it do so, assuming shape in his dreams.

He pictured a little house built on the side of the hill leading to the Trust Luck mine, hung with morning-glories, set like a jewel in the clear Colorado dawn, or dreaming in the white effulgence of the Western moon. A little house, that he hadn't thought of before, just the kind of a place that a girl like Cissy could convert into the home for his heart. He went on dreaming — for it was four days since he had seen the dream-girl in the blue gown, and nothing reminded him that he had vowed a vow to her.

One rainy day Billy found Cissy curled up on the sofa in the library, reading Tennyson. Around her was strewn a miscellaneous assortment of old books and modern novels. She apologetically held up a very damp handkerchief and moved over into the corner to hide her eyes.

"It's the *Lily Maid of Astolat*," she explained, making a place beside her for him; "I have never altogether recovered from her death. I weep every time I read it."

He settled himself comfortably. "Does this represent your taste?" he asked, picking up the book idly.

Cissy laughed. "In poetry, maybe," she admitted. "My favorite novel might amuse you — *Robinson Crusoe*. I know it by heart."

He replied that he didn't know that girls cared for books of adventure.

"Oh, yes they do," she assured him. "I thrill with delight every time Robinson discovers Friday's tracks. I've slipped in a hundred times and cleaned the cave up when he was out hunting, and wished that he'd never come back and that I might live on that desert island alone. I planned out years ago how I'd fish and hunt and dig up a garden with a pointed stick."

"Why," he interrupted, "only a man would enjoy an existence like that. You'd die of loneliness, bored to death watching the clouds."

"I wouldn't," she contradicted. "I used to say my prayers when I was a little girl, and the boon I asked was that during the night I might dream I was one of the little children in the Swiss family who lived up the tree."

"If you really like that kind of life," Billy was saying, "you ought to go West."

"Tell me about it," she begged, settling deeper among her cushions. The rain outside was coming down in broadsides against the long French windows. The wood fire on the hearth burned brightly and threw dancing shadows on book-lined walls, collected by three generations of Rutledges. It was the time and the place, and Billy, with the fleeting inconstancy of his sex, forgot she was not the girl.

He told her about his life at the mine, of the wide, beautiful country west of the Mississippi, its forests, its mineral wealth, its untouched resources. "In one way," he said, "it reminds me — a man going West does — of the pioneer seeking his fortune in the virgin New World. The West really hasn't been discovered yet —"

"And the wind sweeps over the prairies for miles and miles," she said, "without touching a human face. A camp fire ten miles away is a beacon beckoning to the next neighbor. What's the poem about 'I want free life and I want fresh air'?"

"And I sigh for the canter after the cattle.' It's *Lasca*. You like it?"

She shivered and crossed over to the yellowed old spinet which had been removed from the parlor to make room for Clothilde's modern piano. "You know the music to it?" she asked. "It's this." Her fingers caressed the old keys in weird, mournful cadences. "Doesn't it express it — this melody — something you could translate without knowing the story? I can hear beneath it those cattle rushing like the wind over the body of the girl. That was love," softly, to herself. "Was it really true, do you think?"

"Oh, certainly not," he comforted. "It was probably written by somebody who had never been away from Broadway."

Cissy played on and on from the tattered, ancient music that had belonged to those other generations. Billy was thinking how this girl would fit into the life out West — into those hunting trips of his.

"I say," he called, taking a map from his pocket as he paused a moment to look out at the rain, "did I ever show you this map of Colorado?" She wheeled the stool around to see. "You see this river," pointing to a threadlike black boundary on the map; "that's a branch that comes from Lord knows where up this mountain. It is clear as crystal and cold as ice even in August. Did I ever show you these kodak pictures?" taking out a wallet. "They were taken when I was up here last summer. You have only to drop a line here

for the biggest speckled trout you've ever seen, and deer and bear and every other animal to be hunted is hiding out there in those bushes." He indicated the background of the forest in the pictures. "The sun comes up here, behind this peak. You'd think the top of that mountain was an opal burning with pink and pale green and purple lights, when you see it before the sunrise —"

"Oh," Cissy breathed softly, "and the air is like —?"

"Wine," he said. "It makes you want to get up and climb, climb away from the world, to get to that opal-topped summit."

"And the sunsets!" Cissy meditatively studied the photograph. "Where does the sun set in this picture?"

"Here," he pointed, "in a sea of liquid rose and gold. Then a moon as big as a cart wheel swims out over the mountains, and every star seems to be trying to put the others out of business."

"And the thin gray smoke goes up from the camp fire." She spoke as if she were reading it. "Because it is now night —"

"You bet your life it isn't thin and gray," he laughed, in his big man's way. "It's a blaze that goes up like an East Indian juggler's rope, a sash-ribbon of flame, that wriggles and flutters to scare away the varmints of the night. It always reminds me of Jacob's ladder, con-

necting this world with the one up yonder somewhere."

"Oh," Cissy enthused softly, "I don't think they ought to blame you for not coming home. How could you ever leave it?"

"It wasn't that I didn't want to," he explained, in a matter-of-fact tone. "I couldn't afford to, those first few years. I didn't have much more than the scenery to live on; then Burke Preston came out, and we roughed it and starved together. We would leave our own mine and wander all about in the neighboring States. We've staked claims in five States. And to put in a hundred dollars' worth of work on each one a year keeps you hustling, when you're the one who has to do the digging."

"That's the reason, to see you now," she flattered simply, "one would think you had never been out of training fifteen minutes in your life."

"Pooh," Billy waved away her flattery. "I'm effete, — and soft with civilization, now. You should have seen us when we were crossing that part of the country where for forty miles there's a foot trail through a desert, and ten steps to the right or left of it is a salt marsh hungrier than any quicksand you ever read about. And all along the path are the bleached bones of those who have gone before to cheer us up. In those days, Miss Dalrymple, I could put a Varsity coach quick where he couldn't say a word. I was strong as Samson —"

"Well, you look as though you were now," she said, surveying his powerful shoulders, his bronzed face that New York hadn't robbed of its tan, and his limbs like a lithe Indian's.

Through the slanting downpour the world outside swam in a sea of water. The syringa bushes and the winter honeysuckles, laden with early blossoms, swayed to and fro in the wind that twisted at their very roots. Chickens had sought shelter beneath them and huddled close together in neighborly coöperation to try to keep warm. The cedar trees showed a fungus, dark-red growth that is characteristic of them in wet weather. The whole rain-soaked garden was desolation as vast to its twittering citizens, the birds, as the world must have been to Noah, when the tempest abated. Within the library the two might have been the sole survivors of a wreck, dry, warm, and safe from the storm. The fire crackled and roared and defied the shivering tempest that shrieked at the windows, trying to get in.

Cissy had gone back to the spinet and was idly picking out melodies. Billy watched her from the window and felt his heart softening dangerously. He had forgotten his brother's well-meant warning. He was wondering, and his speculations almost took the form of dreams set to "When you and I were young, Maggie," that Cissy picked out with tender appreciative fingers, while she hummed softly the words that went with it. He

was wondering if Cissy would love those long, purple twilight up the mountain side in the firs, as he loved them. If she would thrill over the discovery of a new jewel in the sunrise, as he had thrilled in the days when Nature and God's works were his only friends and neighbors. If she would come back after a hard day's tramping, hungry and ravenous, to a hunter's feast, and give thanks silently as she turned in for the night that the world was a very good place to live in — if you are out of it. Even one not addicted to sentimental romancing might have seen more than ordinary admiration in the dark eyes of the man, as he towered over the girl at the piano and drank in her springtime charm.

Billy was merely hoping that his sweetheart would always wear white in the mornings, the soft, frilly, white things that Cissy affected. He couldn't keep his eyes off Cissy; she was prettier to-day than usual. If she hadn't looked so much like the girl of his dreams, he told himself, he wouldn't have looked at her a second time. Cissy's clinging white frock brought out the likeness. This girl had the same exquisite curve of throat and chin that his dream-girl had; her ears were pink and shell-like, as were those of the girl he loved. He dared not look too long at Cissy's hands, though they were the hands of the lady of his dreams. He refused to consider the white-shod foot that hunted for the soft pedal. He was arguing with himself as he wandered from

the window to the fire, and back again to the spinet, that all pretty girls looked alike. He even went so far as to try to convince himself that the wet, plum-blossom fragrance that lingered about Cissy, even as it clung to the girl of his dreams — that faint elusive fragrance that was like elfin music heard in a dream — was, maybe, after all, only some fashionable perfume of the moment, and girls in general were using it.

“What are you thinking about?” Cissy called over her shoulder to him at the window. “Come help me sing.”

There was no reply. The man's thoughts were far away. Outside the window, hid in the blurring rain and wind, glanced an elflike reflection — a girl in a blue gown. Her face, when he could see it, might have been reproachful, but it seemed rather to mock him. He had sudden recollections of a vow he had made — a vow he had come very near breaking. Some devil was trying to undermine his loyalty, to pooh-pooh that vow by assuring him over and over that the girl in the blue gown was only a creation of his wine-stimulated imagination.

In her place in the locket of his heart, the same tempter was trying to put Cissy's picture. It was telling him that here was Cissy, young and lovely with youth's fragrance and beauty, that the dream-girl might, for all he knew, be an inhabitant of another continent. He clinched his hands and gave the tempter the lie.

He was in honor bound to the dream-girl, and he would find her —

“Then the little maid replied,
(Some say she sighed)”

crooned Cissy, picking out the accompaniment at random.

“Will the love you’re so rich in
Make a fire in the kitchen —”

He strode suddenly toward her. It was as if he expected to see another in the place she sat. His face was pale; his eyes intense. He caught her hand. “Tell me,” he demanded roughly, “how you happened to play that song? What made you do it?” He held her hand in a tight grip.

“Why, what’s the matter?” and in genuine alarm she started back, seeing his face. “I played it because here it is,” pointing to the page in the portfolio. “You make me feel,” hysterically, “as if I had raised a ghost out of this crumbling yellow music. What is the matter?”

He recovered himself with an effort, thoroughly ashamed of the silly emotion he had displayed. “It’s nothing,” he laughed without mirth. “Er — some day — maybe I’ll tell you!” He strode back to the window. “What a —— fool I am,” he whispered under his breath, still strangely agitated. Cissy, divining that he was trying to hide from her something he didn’t



It was as if he expected to see another in the place she sat.

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re to speak about, played on at random, but not that
ece.

She started to call him a moment later to come help
er sing, to divert him, but when she saw his preoccupa-
on, the expression that was on his face as he still stared
oomily out of the window into the rain-soaked garden,
he tiptoed softly from the room and left him alone with
s thoughts, whatever they were.

CHAPTER VII

A RENEWAL OF THE SEARCH

"To some love comes so silently and late
He all unheeded is and passes by;
Leaving no gift but a remembered sigh,
While they stand watching at another gate."

— *Songs of Dreams.*

THE confession that Billy made to his brother on the night of his arrival regarding his engagement to a girl in New York had unexpectedly proved a serious embarrassment to that young man when a week went by and he still lingered at the plantation. His host was unduly solicitous concerning the prospective sister-in-law. He worried, because he knew the feminine propensity to worry.

He felt that Billy would have cause to regret it later if he let anything prevent him from hurrying back to her. In a measure he felt responsible for having separated the two lovers, maybe at the psychological moment in the course of their true love. The chances are that with his easy-going habit of shedding anxieties, he would never have given the matter a second thought, if it hadn't been for his wife.

Bob had to explain under solemn vows of secrecy a part of the mystery — the reasons Billy could not be trusted on to carry out the plans she had arranged for him. Clothilde cheerfully abandoned those she had arranged and let her speculative dreams wander to the New York girl. It was charming to think of Billy marrying. Her plans for a week's festivities were not interrupted; the girl was merely changed. Maybe the New York girl would persuade Billy to live in the South instead of going back to the mine.

With a woman's curiosity, Clothilde observed Billy; but how he was conducting the courtship at long range. She kept Bob's interest fanned. It was she who told her husband that no letters had come addressed to Billy in a feminine hand, and it was she who reminded her husband that no messages had been received by the young man except those that came daily from the New York office and the mine. She couldn't understand the affair. She made no bones of saying so. Bob was convinced that the trip South had caused trouble. Finally he put the straight question to Billy.

"See here," he said, "it isn't Cissy, is it, Bill, old man, who is making you forget your sweetheart in New York? Would you not to fool around her?"

Billy flushed up, and asked him hotly on what he based his premises.

"Well, why the deuce don't you write to each other?"

he demanded. "No girl is going to stand such neglect. It seems to me if it were really a serious affair that you would be sending special deliveries several times a day. First thing you know she will be giving you the slip."

Billy cursed Bob's infernal curiosity with brotherly license and told him to attend to his own affairs. He muttered something about his sweetheart being "different."

Bob interrupted. "No, she isn't different," he contradicted, "if she is a woman. Every blooming daughter of Eve is exactly alike when it comes to an affair of the heart. The sex hasn't advanced two steps since Adam strolled off to look at the animals in the Zoo and left Eve to amuse herself. When he came back she had picked up an acquaintance. The whole family moved out of the Garden shortly after. No man can go off and leave a woman to amuse herself, not even writing to find out what she is doing, without coming back to find — if there's anybody agreeable been around — that she hasn't refused to be drawn into a conversation. Use your own judgment, but the world's a pretty big place, and a man's not much of a man who neglects a girl he professes to love."

"You go to the devil," Billy angrily advised. "I'm going to get the mail myself after this, and I'm going back to New York to-morrow."

"That's right," Bob encouraged, ignoring the other

ger. "Marry her next Monday if she'll say so, and bring her down here, and we'll show her a honeymoon she can't forget if she is five times a widow."

In the pile of letters on the hall table to be carried to the post office that afternoon Billy noticed one; the description caught his eye. It was addressed to Louise, Cleaning Establishment, corner Fourth Avenue and ——— Street, New York City." It was Miss Plymple's stationery. He wondered. He was still grieved, as he rode off, about the family prying into his correspondence.

Since the day in the library he had avoided Cissy. He had never been particularly attracted to her, he told himself, save for the reason that she bore a slight resemblance to his dream-girl sweetheart, His sweetheart — the blue girl in blue! He had been at home a week now and that indicated an indifference that even Bob had noticed. What must the girl herself think of him? He never saw her any more in his dreams. When he did think of her — he ground his teeth because he had to admit to himself it was true — she was somehow curiously confused with Cissy. Confound Cissy, — and he bucked the horse sharply; Bob had suspected that it was she who was making him forget the girl to whom he was engaged.

The post office at Bayside is in one corner of the general store. About its rusty, smoky stove a group of

lounge sit day in and day out, smoking tobacco and chewing it, discussing the meager topics of neighborhood news. Billy's arrival was hailed with excited joy. Most of the men were tenants on his brother's plantation and had been for years; he had known them when a boy. They found him unchanged by his new prosperity; he was the same boy that had hunted rabbits with them and their children, and eaten democratically wherever he happened to be at mealtime; he was still the unspoiled "neighbor" that he was when a tow-headed boy.

Jed Givens, the postmaster, greeted the new arrival genially and rallied him about not coming to "town" as often as they expected a city gentleman would. "Must be some attraction over on th' plantation," he continued. "I been hearin' things, — how you and Miss Cissy are swimmin' with the current. Y'all be gettin' spliced soon?"

"Jed," Billy replied, "why don't you give up the store, and start a paper?"

"Couldn't git none of 'em," indicating his guests grouped about the store, "to subscribe. Th' last one of 'em would drop in and soak up the news in the awf'ic — and never let me git their names on the subscription list." This sally was greeted by a loud guffaw.

"We'd hev ter git the news fer him," Bill Scott said. "Think we'd subscribe to a paper whar we furnisheed

the news items gratis?" He turned to Billy. "I seen you two ridin' tergether ever' day las' week," he said. "You make er mouty good-lookin' young couple."

"Caint that gal ride, Miss Cissy!" Tom Lundy inquired lazily. "Ter look at her, you'd think she'd be feared to let er pet Shetland eat sugar outen her hand. But, Lord, I seen her break two mustangs last winter that not air man on th' place would mount."

Jed brought out the mail. There was a heap of letters and innumerable papers and magazines. He laid the letters, end to end, down on the counter. They made a row that reached two yards. "That's the way we measures her mail," he explained. "Miss Cissy gits at least two yards of letters a day, — and five uv 'em comes reglar frum the same fellers."

"She git one terday frum Stokes, Strainer, and Wilson, attorneys-at-law in Washington, D.C.?" Tom Lundy asked.

"Yes." Jed held it up for Billy to see. "Do you happen to know which one of the law firm is sweet on her?"

Billy did not, to the universal regret of those present.

"And here's old reg'lar frum Mobile." He held up another letter. "Griswold and Templin," architects. "I think it's Templin, down there. She writes back to him occasionally."

There were several letters in the lot to Billy. One of these was from Burke Preston, another from the San

Francisco man with whom he had equal interest in a real estate venture in Los Angeles. He ripped this letter out to see if any later developments had changed the situation since he had last heard. Johnston outlined his plans to make the holdings more profitable by disposing of them to an Eastern syndicate in the market for California lands. The letter went on to say that he (Johnston) would be in New York within the next two weeks and he hoped Billy would join him. The date decided on when he would leave California he would wire.

"I clean furgot," Jed drawled, knocking the ashes out of the stove by kicking it with his foot, "there's a special delivery letter here that come yestiddy fur Miss Cissy, but I didn't see nobody passin'. I 'lowed to bring it by myself this evenin' if none of you didn't come over to-day."

Billy took the letter and suddenly changed his mind about making the remark that was on the tip of his tongue.

"And I think, since I come ter mention it, that Bub's got some tellergrams over at the depot ter send out ter your place. He called over about two hours ago and asked if I'd sent the special delivery yit, and said he'd like to git whoever took it ter carry the tellergrams along too."

"I didn't send 'em on over," Bub explained, "because they didn't seem ter be specially important. Miss

Cissy's is from somebody that calls herself 'Polly,' askin' her ter come on as soon as possible, and your'n said: 'Meet me in New York Monday,' signed by W. K. Johnston. I allus send tellergrams at onct when anybody's dead. Business kin wait —"

"Bub," said Billy, surveying the shock-headed operator, "your intelligence is only approached by your unrivaled volubility. The next time you hold any telegrams that come to this office for anybody, I'm going to thrash you. You remember how I used to lick you when we went rabbit hunting?"

"I didn't know they was important," Bub whimpered.

"I'll thrash you," Billy announced, "to help you remember such issues are not for you to decide. Now get busy and tell me when the next train leaves for New York?"

Bub pointed out that he couldn't get a train until the following morning. Billy asked what connections he could make by driving through the country to the county seat, twelve miles away. Bub disposed of this suggestion by announcing triumphantly that the big bridge on the dirt road had been washed away and the stream was impassable. Billy mounted his horse and started home. He was glad that he had made up his mind to return to New York. The Los Angeles investment represented a good deal of money. It was highly important for him to talk matters over with Johnston.

By leaving on the morning train he would reach New York on Sunday night.

The road stretched like a brown satin ribbon before him. On either side the snake rail fence formed a zigzag border. Over this leaned sumach, glowing with its red velvet fires, and sassafras, sweet gum, dried grasses, and cat-tails. The afternoon was yet young. He had started shortly after the midday dinner, and now it could hardly be three o'clock. He observed the old landmarks along the road, the ancient horse gin, still in operation, and its water mill, where the corn meal for the adjoining plantation was ground. This was all familiar ground, hallowed by his boyhood memories. He had driven over it in the old days with his father and mother, going each Sunday to the country church set on yonder hillside.

Unconsciously he turned his horse's head in that direction. For about the ivy-grown church was the burying ground in which his people slept. He had not been there in ten years. Time rolled back as he stood with uncovered head by the graves of his mother and father. His memory of his mother was vague, for she had died when he was a child, but he had been his father's idol. In him the visionary father had seen that which encouraged him to believe that the things he had fought for in his life would be achieved by one of his family. In part this had come to pass.

It was recollections of the long talks he had had with

his father about the West that led Billy to make his choice and take the mine when the property was divided. The Trust Luck mine had practically proved the quicksand bog that had swallowed up the family fortunes that his father, William Rutledge, had inherited from his father. Now the son had recovered from it all, and more than his father had lost.

Billy brushed away a tear. "Dad," he said in the old childish term of affection, "your dream came true. Fate played you a scurvy trick. The gold was not five feet away from where you went for it last."

The peace that broods over the quiet homes of the dead was undisturbed. Billy sat on the gravestone and for the first time, perhaps, reflected on the brevity of human life. "Not five feet from where he spent the best years of his life and all of his money, digging," he reflected. Then it came back to him what his father had often said: that no man's work has been done in vain if he leaves behind him a son who can take it up and carry it to completion.

"I've done the best I could with it," he began. "There's a lot of my life lately that wouldn't be a credit to you, but I'm back off the false trails for good now, Dad, after life's true gold — love," he confided quietly.

As the horse picked her way daintily through mud-holes and bogs, Billy was realizing that all these childhood memories were dearer to him than he had

suspected. Even these roads, these bridges, had risen in his estimation since he had returned to them. It was dear to his heart — the old place was, with its memories.

Bob and Clothilde had peopled it with another generation of laughing, shouting children. Bob and Clothilde and their six happy-hearted kids were all the people he had now. Good old Bob, with his one thought to get him settled. Well, altogether, he thoughtfully agreed, deep within his secret heart, it was about the best there was in life, anyway. But at best he was an outsider, however much they might try to make him one of them, the bachelor uncle, who, though he might hold the kids in his arms until they grew to man's estate, would still miss the sweetest feeling of all — that he was responsible for them, in sickness and health, in happiness and in sorrow, because they were his own.

Yes, here they were all grouped in his memory, Bob and Clothilde and the six young ones; he had fresh in his mind the picture of the night he drove up. From the shadowy background of his memory, Cissy's tea-rose face took shape. In her eyes slept the same wistful dream as they rested on the children that disturbed his heart.

He hit Firefly sharply. What did he care about Cissy? He'd show Bob his taste in girls when he brought home the dream maiden in blue, under the white mist of a bridal veil.

New York and a renewal of the search for Her tomorrow!

CHAPTER VIII

WRIT IN THE STARS

"As o'er my palm the silver piece she drew
And traced the line of life with searching view,
How throbbed my fluttering pulse with hopes and fears
To learn the color of my future years."

At the big plantation gate he found Cissy and the small Bob waiting for him to go partridge hunting with them. Cissy looked very little and young on Bob's big hunter. Her close-fitting, black habit revealed her slim proportions. Her bronze hair, braided, was pinned close under the soft hat. She sat the nervously fretting horse with the ease and grace of a Western rider. He was amazed to find there was no saddle on the horse, only a blanket folded and buckled on.

She glanced through her letters and telegram, explaining that most of them were from Polly Gardner, who wanted her to come on to Atlanta for Christmas. "I'm not going," she replied, in answer to his question. "I'm going to stay here and help Bob and Clothilde fill the children's stockings. I wouldn't miss that for a dozen balls and receptions."

Bob had ridden ahead to investigate a fence torn down.

Billy was remarking that he didn't know she could shoot. Also he was asking her where she learned to ride like that. She babbled on about staying with the T's up in Virginia all of November, and recounted some hunts in which she had been in at the death.

"Do you know," Billy heard himself say, "at first glance you are rather a bewildering young person? For the life of me I couldn't make out whether you played *The Maiden's Prayer* or went fox hunting."

Cissy laughed deliciously. "I do both," she said. "Look yonder," wheeling her horse across the field, where Bob was bringing down a shower of birds from the cloud that had risen from a marsh. "Don't shoot!" she cried, as Billy leveled his gun. "I hate to see things killed."

"Well, of all things," he murmured. "You a hunter! Consistency, thy name — is —"

"Cecilia Dalrymple," she added. "Bob has killed enough birds," she begged. "Let's have a gallop down that old road yonder."

It was more of a walk than a gallop, for the former trail had been almost all washed away; great fissures cut it this way and that. Once he thought of telling her all about leaving for New York and asking her woman's advice in going about the task of finding Her. But something held the confidence back. He couldn't understand how Cissy could be two persons; one when he was with her, altogether a different one when he was away. In the

rank warmth of her blue eyes he would have told her anything; once away from her, all his thought was to keep her out of the place she seemed trying to usurp — the place that belonged to the girl in the blue gown.

He was telling her about his childhood days in this old field, how he used to play Indians here and pirates there. He pointed out the red clay caves on the hillside and described his boyish adventures in holding wayfarers up. All the good times he used to have in this field came back to him, as the horses picked their way over the rain-washed road.

“Doesn’t it make you feel,” Cissy asked, “what somebody has said — that nothing that happens after you are twelve matters — is true? For myself I know I’ve never been quite so happy as when I was at that enchanted age and had a playhouse and surreptitiously cooked Irish potatoes on a stove made from old tomato cans.”

“I’ll show you our old playhouse,” he said. “It’s up a little farther.” He searched the sides of the road for a path he used to know. At last it was found, grass-grown and only faintly discernible. “Here it is,” he cried, as they halted in front of a rock-walled cave in the hillside. He dismounted and explained to her its advantages as a point of siege and its comforts generally. He showed her the stone under which they buried their stolen treasures.

She was as interested as a child. “My, but wouldn’t

I have liked to keep house there," she declared, espying a cave in the rear. "What a place for a kitchen!"

"We missed all that," he laughed. "Bob and I — we took our meals with the family, or stole cold provisions against a time of siege up here."

"I've never had a pet," she reminisced, "that I was so truly fond of as I was of the canary birds I had when I kept house under a tree. They were," she nearly tumbled off her horse with laughter, "those little fat worms you find in rotten acorns! The cages we kept them in were saucers of big acorns, two put together and padded with cotton. They made beautiful pets, those worm canaries — they were so intelligent."

From the brow of the hill on which they halted a panorama of rolling fields spread out below them. Down the hill, half hidden in the bushes, a picturesque cabin nestled. From the mud-daubed chimney a faint line of blue smoke rose. Billy's eye was arrested.

"Don't you want to have your fortune told?" he asked suddenly. "Yonder is where Mam' Judy, the plantation oracle, lives. She is the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter and several hundred years old. Let's go to see her."

"Let's!" Cissy exclaimed, gleefully. "I have never had my fortune told. I'd like to know what to expect."

Mam' Judy's cabin might have been arranged by a stage director for the abode of a "conjurer." Its dark

recesses were lighted by the glow from the dying fire. The solitary window was curtained by a thick calico quilt. On the hearth was a skillet containing corn bread, which was being cooked by coals heaped around it and on top of the iron lid. In the ashes in the fireplace sweet potatoes were roasting. Mam' Judy was in the act of pulling these from the fire when the two drew rein before her door and dismounted.

Cissy started back in half affright. She had often heard of the old woman but had never seen her before. Mam' Judy was wizened to the point of emaciation. Her brown face, wrinkled and seamed, was thrown into relief by a crown of snowy hair which was only partially concealed by a bright bandanna handkerchief. Her hands were like bird claws. A smile showed glittering red gums, guiltless of teeth. Billy called briskly to her. In response she came to the door, a corn cob pipe in her mouth. On recognizing him, she manifested great surprise and joy.

"Law, chile," she crooned, "I ain't never b'lieved yet you was gwine let old Mam' Judy die 'thout comin' to tell her good-by. Who dis pretty lil gal you got wid you?" turning to Cissy.

Billy explained who Cissy was and that they had come to have their fortunes told. He slyly slipped a quantity of small change into her hand. She clutched at it eagerly, giving no indication, as it disappeared in the folds

of her skirt where a pocket lurked, that it had passed between them. "I knowed you wuz comin'," she declared. "I seed it in de fiah las' night."

When she had made coffee to get the grounds, and replenished the fire to make more coals, she announced she was ready to begin. She reminded them that only the one whose fortune was being told must hear what the future had in store for that one. Billy found himself pushed outside and the door slammed behind him. He mounted his horse to ride back after little Bob, and met that youngster at the foot of the hill, with a bag full of partridges to show his prowess as a hunter.

Mam' Judy raked the coals and arranged them on the hearth. She poured the coffee and the girl drank some, making a wish. Then, with many curious incantations and much mumbling to herself, the witchlike old woman began :

"'Tain't no use fer me to tell you what's pas' an' gone," she remarked, screwing up her face as she leaned nearer the coals. "You ain't keerin' 'bout none dem men you lef' behine you, is you, honey?" Cissy laughed noncommittally. "Dey been swarmin' round you," the crone continued; "yer couldn't stir 'em wid er stick, de sweethearts you could er had. But I ain't seein' nairy one in de crowd you lef' behine you dat you'd spit at — ain't dat de truf, baby?" Again Cissy fenced with a smile. "De man you love 'thout knowin' it, and

de one whut worships de ground yoh hoss's foot teches,
'thout knowin' he loves you, he's right in callin' distance
now —"

"S-sh," whispered Cissy in sudden alarm. "He'll
hear you. You mustn't tell me what you don't see."

"I ain't gwine tell you half I does see. I sees tears and
gwine-away journeys and strange men, and I heahs dance
music, but dat ain't gwine he'p you fergit de man you
love way down in yo' heart 'thout knowin' it. You
gwine marry Marse Billy, honey, es sho' as dars a Gawd
in Hebben."

"You mustn't! You mustn't say that," the girl cried
in alarm. Taking out her purse, she emptied the con-
tents. "Here, I will give you all this not to tell him that.
Don't tell him anything about me, Mam' Judy —"

Mam' Judy's lean hand caressed the girl's head.
"Honey," she said, "I been tellin' fortunes evah since de
stars fell and I done learnt plenty er sense in dat time.
Don't you worry. Mam' Judy ain't gwine tell no secrets
you ax her not ter. You come back heah by yohse'f
some time. I got somp'en else ter tell you." Her claw-
like fingers caressed the silver and it disappeared in the
folds of her skirt.

Cissy tried to persuade Billy that it was growing too
late for him to have his fortune told. Her apprehensions
that it would rain he passed off lightly and told her to
help little Bob watch the horses while he had his fate

read. The same process of mending the fire and drinking coffee was gone through with.

"There's just one thing I want to know," Billy cut short Mam' Judy's rambling prologue of his good fortune in finding the "gole ground" as she put it, in referring to the mine. "Tell me what it is I want you to tell me, Mam' Judy, and I will believe you are a witch."

"You knows I ain't er witch, Marse Billy," she protested. "But I can tell you what you want er know," and she smiled. "Love done crep' into yo' heart when you warn't lookin'." She folded her arms and beamed at him triumphantly. "I kin describe yo' sweetheart — and she de puttiest lil gal Mam' Judy's eyes is feasted on in menny er day." She was crouched low over the coals.

"Go on," he commanded.

"She got hair lak hickory leaves when de frost teches 'em — all gold an' brown, lighted wid sunshine."

"She has," he encouraged.

"She got skin lak de inside uv er aigshell, an' er mouf what de angels mixed up red haw-berries ter mark. Ain't Mam' Judy seein' right, Marse Billy?"

"Go on."

"She got two lil ears lak crumpled pink sea shells, and her eyes is blue as periwinkle flowers in de springtime."

"And when she passes," he spoke half to himself, "it is like the wind blowing over plum blossoms in an April rain."

"Ain't dat de truf?" Mam' Judy agreed. "Does you know her already, honey?" she asked, craftily.

He ignored the question. "Mam' Judy, look close," he commanded. "See what kind of dress she is wearing. The color now is the proof of whether you are telling me the truth or not."

Mam' Judy bent lower. Was this the little imp of a Billy who mocked at her divinations once upon a time? He sat tense, waiting for her to speak again. She passed from the coals back to the grounds. She shut her eyes and apparently went off into a trance.

"Blue," she finally announced. "It's er blue dress I sees. An' you ain't never gwine git shoes slim ernuff fer em lil foots er her'n."

There was an interruption at the door. Bob and Cissy were calling him to come on.

"Hurry," Billy begged. "Tell me some more. Am I going to marry her? What do you see?" He searched his pockets for more money.

"You gwine tek er journey." Mam' Judy's voice was far away again. "You gwine have many ups and mo' downs; you gwine git er letter and er present. You gwine meet wid er accident. You gwine git mouty low, n yo' spirits; you gwine find her do', in de end —"

The door was burst open by Bob. Billy rose shamefaced to his feet. Cissy was at the boy's heels. "Mam' Judy," Bob called lustily, "haven't you got some pota-

toes baking in those ashes? Give us some corn bread out of that skillet!"

Mam' Judy, the witch, was gone. Mam' Judy, the hostess and cook, stood in her place. She fished potatoes out of the coals and broke and buttered hot corn bread for the three hungry hunters. They ate and laughed and listened to her reminiscences and forgot to notice the gathering darkness outside. When they started at last and came to the hill, Billy remembered he had left something behind — his gloves and his riding crop. He told the others to ride on and he would overtake them. Mam' Judy was at the door waiting for him. "I knowed you gwine come back," she greeted him. "I seed it in de fiah."

"Mam' Judy," he asked hurriedly, "did you see it in the fire that I am going to find the girl in the blue gown — the one I am going to marry? Did you see that? Am I going to find the girl I am looking for now, and marry her?"

"Yo' sho' is," she replied solemnly. "You right on her track dis minit. Don't let nothin' interfere wid yo' plans, Marse Billy; you gwine git her. I seed yer tergedder in de bottom er de tea-cup." He was gone.

They galloped three abreast across the waving fields of sage grass. The sun had long since set and the early twilight had almost given place to night. Just here the road had been badly washed. Cissy's horse took the gul-

lies without an effort. Bob called a warning to her about the gap farther down. She was already flying over it. Bob's horse took it lightly. How it happened he never knew, but Firefly lost her nerve, her foot went into a sink hole, and she and Billy went down together; he was pitched headforemost against a tree. When Cissy and Bob reached him he was unconscious.

Cissy hunted frantically for his heart. It beat faintly. "Go for your father as quickly as you can get there," she directed. Her voice was perilously teary.

"I can't leave you here by yourself," the child remonstrated.

"I am not afraid." She controlled herself. "Tell him to hurry with brandy and send somebody for a doctor. Hurry!"

Then she settled herself to wait for help to come.

She knew there was no use to call. Mam' Judy's cabin was two miles away and it was the nearest house. The horses wandered to one side, as if they understood her fear at being left alone. She pillowed Billy's head on her lap, chafing his wrists and calling to him. The pulse still beat, but he was unconscious. She faced the thought that probably he was dying, that he would be dead before assistance could get to them.

Now that he was dead, or nearly so, she knew that she loved him. He had not consciously breathed one word of love to her, but the language of the heart is not depend-

ent on speech. Cissy knew as every woman knows when she is beloved. It is clairvoyance old as creation.

"Billy," she called softly. His face under the tan was very white, his black hair was rumpled and in disorder; he might have been some big boy. She swallowed a lump in her throat, — the most lovable big boy she had ever known. Oh, would Bob never come! It was growing darker. From the neighboring marshes an orchestra of frogs began their weird calling for rain. A night bird, in a tree overhead, twittered from bough to bough, curious to know who these strange new folk below were. Cissy was growing more frightened. The horses, not heeding her call, wandered off down the hill, grazing.

"If anything were to come to really frighten me, when I needed him," she said aloud, "he would come back to life, if he died the next moment." Her warm tears sprinkled his face; her soft hands caressed his brows. "Billy," she wept softly, "Billy darling!" She kissed him as his mother might have bestowed a caress. "Billy, can't you hear me begging you to wake up? Billy!" Her face was close to him; teardrops were still splashing in a futile effort to revive him. She kissed him again and crooned to him all the affection that welled up in her heart. "You'll die and never know I love you!"

He stirred and opened his eyes. They were bloodshot and staring, like one who wakes from a dream. "My

beloved," he looked up at her, "it's you; I've found you at last!" Then he fainted again.

Then the next moment she heard a loud "hallo," and the lights were coming. It was Bob and Clothilde, and she couldn't distinguish the rest, for she fainted for the first time in her life.

"She's coming around all right," she next heard Bob saying; "a little more brandy, please!" Though she was weak and giddy, she sat up and declared nothing was the matter with her. Bob assured her Billy was as good as new; they moved off, she never quite knew how, in some sort of a conveyance towards the house.

That there were no broken bones was the bulletin Clothilde brought her when the doctor had come, only a sprained ankle and a dislocated collar bone. Billy would probably be all right in a few days. He was complaining of queer feelings in his head. Cissy was propped up in pillows with a queer feeling in her own head. Clothilde came back from the room of the patient after a sleeping potion had been administered to say that Dr. Martin and Bob were going to sit up with him all night in case he needed them.

Clothilde had another anxiety on her mind which she poured out to Cissy. She asked the young woman's advice about what ought to be done about the mysterious sweetheart in New York. "I think we ought to telegraph her," she said, "only I am not supposed to know

the first thing about the matter. Billy told Bob when he first came about some adorable creature in New York who had made a man out of him and all that sort of thing. Bob had to tell me. And that's all I know. Now, I have put everything together, and I am sure that they have had a falling out because Billy came South. I was the cause of his coming, so I feel I'm responsible for the whole miserable affair. I sent the telegram pretending Bob wanted to see him on business. And no matter what Bob Rutledge may say, I'm going to wire that girl to come on down here to him."

"Maybe she wouldn't want to," Cissy suggested, a strange, new giddiness seizing her. "He told me he was going back to New York in the morning anyway."

"The doctor says he can't leave this house inside of two weeks at least," Clothilde triumphantly rejoined. "If I could find out the girl's name, she and her mother could come on down to nurse him, and they could get married here. Wouldn't that be lovely, Cissy, a wedding right here at Bayside —"

"Ye-es," Cissy replied with an effort, "it would."

"What on earth are you doing, Maria?" Clothilde demanded on her next trip to the girl's room. Maria, Cissy's old "mammy-nurse" and now her "lady's maid," was packing that young woman's trunk.

"Me and Miss Cissy gwine ter tek er trip. I'm packin'

her clo'es ter go ter Miss Polly Gardner's termorrow mawnin' —"

Cissy sat with weary eyes watching the old woman at her work.

"Have you lost your senses, child?" Clothilde turned to Cissy. "You told me you weren't going to Atlanta until after Christmas."

Cissy held up the telegram. "I forgot to tell you," she said, "a message came this afternoon, and it's very important for me to get off on that early train in the morning, Clothilde —"

"I never, in all of my life," — Clothilde sank down on the trunk, tucking her slippered feet under her kimono, — "saw any human being make up her mind with the lightning speed that you do, Cissy. I'm going to wire Polly Gardner you are not coming! You are not able to go —"

"I'm going on the early train in the morning," Cissy announced; "you needn't say a word, Clothilde. I'm going!"

CHAPTER IX

NOT A CHRISTMAS GLIMPSE OF HER

"May of my heart ! Oh, darling May !
Thy form is with the shows that fleet ;

.

I see no more the things I loved ;
The paths wherein their beauty moved
Do seem to fail beneath my feet."

— ELEANORA LOUISA HERVEY.

BILLY insisted that he must leave the following week for New York. But he did not ; a high fever set in for several days, after which a lingering period of convalescence gave him leisure to think. His collar bone was broken and his ankle sprained ; both of these were painful, and his impatience did not hasten his return to health. Burke Preston wrote depressingly of the conditions at the mine ; the clerk in his New York office wired wildly for instructions. Johnston reached New York as he had notified, and waited for Billy to join him. Bob attended to this part of his business for him by wiring the instructions he dictated, after which he tentatively suggested that he was ready to send any other wires or write any letters his brother might wish him to. Billy believed that was all. Then Bob again began to argue with him

about what a man owed to the girl whom he loved. Billy's limited stock of patience gave away altogether.

"Go to the mischief!" he cried savagely. "Quit meddling with my affairs, will you? I'm not going to marry anybody. The whole thing's off. Doctor or no doctor, I'm going to New York to-morrow!"

The girl in the blue gown came no more. Not even in his delirium had he seen her. When he did, it was Cissy; and Cissy, he knew, had left the morning after his accident for Atlanta. He was angry with himself for thinking about Cissy. What did he care about her, anyway? he kept asking himself. Suddenly, something deep down in his heart asked him the point-blank question: why didn't he marry Cissy? Why didn't he take what was within reach? He knew he could make her happy. Why, he could simply steal Cissy when nobody was looking. Wooing a girl like her was out of the question. She was a regular little Sabine. The man who won her would simply have to throw her over his shoulder and run. He could make her happy.

Cissy had all the attributes of the girl he loved, even to the trick of her voice. And Cissy was living, breathing, pulsating with the sweetness and joy of youth and life. How did he know that the dream maiden of the blue gown, if she really existed somewhere, wasn't already married? How did he know — oh, uncomfortable speculation — that when he saw her he would care

to marry her? Dreams sometimes have a way of developing into waking nightmares.

He rejected these suspicions as unworthy. "I have sworn," he said, "to find my girl of the blue gown. I will marry her or no one." He pushed away his supper untasted. The room was unlighted save by the firelight. "Cissy has stolen my sweetheart's likeness, and I have invested her with charms she does not possess. My eyes were rubbed with love-in-idleness, and she was the first girl I saw on waking up. Probably every woman I meet hereafter will, to my disordered mind, have the blue-gown girl's face. It is a trick she is playing to confuse my search. Somebody has said that in every girl a man may find at least one attribute of his ideal woman."

He turned suddenly. Had he — had he not — over yonder by the door, hidden in the shadows, seen a tumbled coiffure of tawny bronze curls against a disappearing background of blue? He sniffed eagerly. It was as if an April wind blew toward him over wet plum blossoms. A message from his sweetheart! But she passed as swiftly as she had come. His mind was made up.

He telegraphed to Burke Preston at the mine to meet him in New York. He wired to Johnston at half a dozen places in the hope of catching him in the East, and then, weak as he was feeling, fell to packing his bag to catch the next train. Bob and Clothilde were helpless. The doctor's orders were ignored, and Billy refused

to let Bob come with him. He made the seven o'clock train.

Clothilde assured her husband that it was the girl in New York who was taking him away. Only a man in love, she argued, would be guilty of such foolishness, — rushing off, on a sprained ankle and with fever, in one direction, when all the telegrams he had been receiving were from the opposite side of the continent. Bob smiled at her woman's logic and was half convinced that her speculations were correct. She sat down to write the whole affair to Cissy, who was still with Mrs. Gardner in Georgia.

Burke Preston reached New York two days after Billy arrived. He found that young man with a doctor and a trained nurse. His ankle was troubling him, also the collar bone; added to this he had a bad case of grippe. Business was a tabooed subject. The doctor gave orders that Mr. Preston was not to stay longer than half an hour at a time. At the end of the week Billy was better. His first sign of recuperation was to discharge his nurse with a check for two weeks in advance, and to install Burke as her successor.

Instead of talking mine business, Billy made a clean breast of the whole story to his friend and bade him begin a search for the girl in the blue gown. Burke Preston was in love himself and he could sympathize. He believed that Billy could find her. He was in sympathy with any

one who pursued an eluding nymph. He was the kind of man whose life in the fresh air and big places helped him to understand. Billy cursed his luck when he tried to stand on the foot, and day after day sat glowering out of the window.

At the cleaner's shop Burke found that Louise had sold out, bag and baggage, to her second cousin's husband. The next thing was to find Louise. She was finally located in Brooklyn. Burke recalled the blue gown to her memory and asked her help in finding its owner, awakening her volubility and French curiosity by a twenty-dollar gold piece.

"Ah, but, Monsieur," Louise deprecated, wringing her fat little hands, "eet ees for ze regrait. I haf no book I keep. My daughter she wrote ze addresses on one slip of papair. I deestroy eet, as I collect. Me, I recall ze blue gown," rolling her eyes heavenward, "but ze name of her who own eet, I nevair know. My Celeste might remembair. I go to-day to see her in Jersey Ceety. She married weeth ze New Yair —"

Burke cut short her dissertations on her daughter's marriage. He would go with her. Could she start in five minutes? She could, Monsieur was of such a generosity. The trip to Jersey City was fruitless. The bride recalled the gown — every gown that had been cleaned — but she had no recollection of the name. The address was on a slip of paper, as her mother had said, and the

paper had been destroyed. During December alone they had cleaned no less than twenty blue gowns. If Monsieur wished, she could give him a list of all the customers she remembered. Maybe he might, by inquiring of each, learn which one owned the blue gown he so much admired. Burke balked at this.

"It's no use," Billy agreed with him after he recounted his day's search; "you have done all you can. You're needed back at the mine. I'll be along as soon as I am convinced that I am chasing a will-o'-the-wisp." The next day Burke started West.

Billy had never before kept up a brisk correspondence with his home people, but now he relieved the tedium of convalescence by writing. Clothilde was still scolding him roundly in sisterly epistles for leaving as he did and for getting ill in New York, with no one to wait on him—and so far from Dr. Martin. Her letter, since Billy's love affair had been strictly expurgated by Bob, was full of Cissy's. Billy could not account for the twinge he felt in the neighborhood of his heart when Clothilde chattered on about Polly Gardner's cousin, the Governor of Georgia, being Cissy's latest conquest. After Cissy left Atlanta, Clothilde said, she was going to Mobile for a house party, after which she would probably come back to Bayside for February. She wasn't sure of this, however, as Cissy had had a sudden relapse into her former enthusiasm for gayety and society, neither of which were attractions offered by the plantation.

Billy threw the letter into the fire. All day he sat at the window, staring in the direction of the cleaner's where a certain bewitched garment had so lately hung. The blue ring in his pocket no longer proved a lure to bring her back. He smoked the pipe that had shared with him the secret of her first coming, but in vain did its rings ascend ceilingward; from its gray mist no more peeped the girl of the blue gown.

Christmas day dawned clear and cold. On the tray with his breakfast was a pile of mail, for the most part invitations for the week. The first was from Mrs. Matthews, who wrote to remind him that he was invited to come to Christmas dinner with them. Mrs. Matthews was Burke Preston's sister. Billy pushed most of the letters aside unread.

"Sure, sir, an' it's a foine day," Grady, his man, observed, after Billy had remembered it was Christmas morning and given him accordingly. "The machine, sir, Oi think is all right again, an' a breath of air would hilp you. Shall I bring it around?"

"You might as well, Grady," Billy assented. "I've got to do something to get through the day."

Grady was a little Irishman whom Billy had rescued from a park bench in Denver five years before. In the mine he had been general factotum, cook, housemaid and valet to both men. Billy had brought him East because the faithful creature refused to be left behind. He kept

place in order, served Billy's meals, and tried to make himself proficient in the duties of a chauffeur. For the last month he had been laid up in a hospital, and the machine had gone back to the factory for repairs, all on account of his driving. It touched his heart to have Billy acquiesce when he suggested that the machine was ready to be taken out again. His broken bones and bruises had hurt him less at the hospital than the thought that maybe his master would take from him the privilege of the automobile he loved next to its owner.

The day was snowy and blowy and not a success, Grady felt regretfully, though no accident marred it so far as he was concerned. They crossed over to Long Island, and he thought they were bound for a favorite place down at the far end, where Billy had been the host of many dinners, the brilliance and gayety of which had dazzled the faithful Grady. But they were not going there now! He was thinking how sad it was that his master had let anything come between him and the cheerful, if somewhat boisterous, companions of those occasions. For himself, Grady longed for another sight of Merita, she of vaudeville fame, whose pictures plastered the billboards of the town. "Sure an' she had a merry heart," the little Irishman had remarked to Billy after one of the dinners where the lady in question had danced; "she cu'd liven up a corpse."

Everywhere, in town and country, Christmas cheer

reigned. They passed gay sleighs of guests, all with the season's gladness writ large on their faces. Billy, alone on the back seat of his machine, sank deeper in the rugs. The thought of festivities depressed his heart. But he could not keep his thoughts from speeding back to Bayside. There to-day his own people were holding their Yuletide jollification. The children were even now perhaps rolling woolly lambs and dolls about the place, and he knew to what his brother's indulgence in the way of libations had reduced "the quarters."

It was not a cheerful day. Grady felt with every mile that his master's spirits sank lower and lower. They reached New York about dusk; a heavy snow had begun falling. As the machine cut a path down Broadway, Grady's faithful heart ached as Billy passed this favorite café and that one with no instructions to stop. His ear caught the music that crept forth from warm, lighted places full of good cheer and company. "Sure and it's a shame to go home," he muttered under his breath. "Him to eat alone on Christmas Day!"

In Billy's heart a vague hope stirred. To-night of all nights maybe she would return. Out into space he sent telepathic messages imploring her to come. He bade Grady lay the table for two, and to order the dinner accordingly. The latter's mercurial spirits went to the top of the thermometer when his master bade him

remember it was Christmas. Accordingly, when Billy in irreproachable evening attire went in to dinner, he found his living room bright with holly, the table glowing with a mass of Christmas flowers. Champagne was in the cooler. Grady, with childish delight, hung around for a word of approval, praising his magic.

"You're a wonder, Grady," Billy declared with his old cheerfulness; "we're as gay with all these decorations as a Bowery drug store on election night." Then his eye fell on the champagne. "Take this and drink it yourself later," he said. "I wouldn't dare offer her anything stronger than ice water."

"Oh, it's a loidy, then, you're ixpictin'?" Grady's tone was deferential and awe-stricken. "Should I have brought sherry, sir?"

"I'm not sure any one is coming," said Billy, taking his seat at the table, "but in the event a friend should drop by, we would feel deuced inhospitable not to be able to offer *him* a bite on Christmas night, Grady."

No one came, though Billy's cheerfulness remained unabated as the dinner progressed. Grady brought him his coffee reluctantly. "So you had to eat by yourself, after all, sir," he regretted.

"That's all right, Grady," Billy replied. "I'm expecting some one later. You can clear out to that Sons of Erin shindy as soon as you like." Grady's Irish heart felt its first Christmas glow of the season.

"An' sure, since you're better, sir," he ventured, "and ixpictin' company, I'm on the reception committee at the door —"

Out yonder somewhere a chime of Christmas bells was ringing. Billy limped over to the window and drew back the heavy curtain. The snow was now coming down in flakes that looked not unlike great white butterflies. The arc lights threw flickering shadows on the ghostly street. Through the swirling white storm even objects across the way were unreal and fantastic. Within the room the fire's red blaze caught in its reflection the glowing holly berries amid the vivid green of the leaves. The poinsettias that had formed the centerpiece of his dinner were on the table under the glow of the lamp. Billy turned irresolutely from the world of the snow fairies outside, back to the big chair and his pipe.

If she were coming, it was high time she were here. He placed a chair in her favorite corner, found a pillow for her head, and then painfully limped to get the footstool nearer. He lighted his pipe and speculatively began to figure on what she would like for Christmas presents. It came to him with a sudden reproach that he hadn't thought until this moment of Christmas presents for anybody!

He replenished his pipe five times and she had not yet come. In sudden disgust Billy came to a realization that the memory of Cissy had occupied the chair over

there all the evening! It was one o'clock. The fire was dead gray ashes. He was cold, and again in his ankle was the infernal pain. He poured himself a brandy and soda, and then another and another. "Such a Christmas as this," he observed bitterly, "is in itself sufficient justification for any sized jag." With which reflection he poured himself another one.

CHAPTER X

A HOME DINNER

“Lo! Still the stars of latter night are spread!
Yet hath sleep stolen from my lonely bed.
So will I set me on my roof-top’s height
To cool my sadness till the dawning red.

“Lo! Now the night lies on the city’s breast,
And thousand thousand lovers rise from rest,
To seek in truth, what day unveiled in dream:—
The one, the all, the maiden manifest.”

—*Songs of the Man on the Roof*, “Kismet.”

GRADY got very much mixed at the 'phone the next morning, when Mrs. Matthews called up.

“That you, Grady?” She had visited Burke Preston, her brother, at the Trust Luck mine, and the little Irishman stood high in her favor. “How is Mr. Rutledge?”

Grady assured her that his master was doing very well, then, lowering his voice cautiously, he added: “That is to say, mum.”

“To say what, Grady?”

Grady considered a reply, diplomatic enough to convey the real situation, his master’s illness and low spirits without letting the latter, who was in his bath

in the next room, divine what he was revealing. This hesitation aroused Mrs. Matthews' suspicions.

"Where were you two yesterday, Grady?" came the question direct.

"Well, Himself, mum," Grady begun, "he was not feelin' up to acciptin' anny invitations —"

"But he didn't stay in," she pursued. "Both of you were out all day. I tried to get you on the wire to ask about him and to wish you a Merry Christmas."

"Well, mum, now," Grady's perplexity conveyed itself over the wire. "We were out, mum, but only fur a lonely ride in the automobile down Long Island way. Sure, an' I hoped it 'ud cheer Himself up."

"Where'd he dine?" There was some curiosity in Mrs. Matthews' tones, but quite as much motherly concern and kindness. She was having her suspicions confirmed. "At the Club?"

"After the ride, mum," Grady continued, "we run back into New York, an' Himself, mum, had dinner here in his rooms, an' alone."

"Tell Mr. Rutledge to come to the 'phone immediately," was her next command.

Billy emerged at this moment. In the mighty splashing of his bath he had not heard the 'phone.

"Mrs. Matthews, sir," Grady announced. "She must speak wid you immediate."

"What's this I'm hearing?" Mrs. Matthews didn't

explain how she had been hearing it. "You driving all day in a snowstorm down on Long Island and not coming near us after we'd invited you?" She gave him no opportunity to reply. "What do you mean, anyway, Billy Rutledge, eating Christmas dinner alone and in your rooms?"

"I'm a kill-joy at any feast these days, dear Mrs. Matthews," he pleaded. "Just one look at me yesterday was enough to make any little child quit believing in Santa Claus. I didn't have the heart to undermine the faith of your nursery, you, the sister of my best friend —"

Mrs. Matthews stopped him there. "You may have the choice of two evils," she said. "I'll bring Evadne. You remember Evadne Saulsbury, the girl you met the night you went to the opera with us.—I'll never forget how you helped me out that night. Yes, she's the daughter of an old friend. Débutante this season. I told you about her. What I'm about to say is this, though," she continued; "I say, you may have the choice of two evils. You can come here and have dinner with us, just a home dinner, or I'll bring Evadne and we'll come to your place and have dinner with you !

"Don't try," she interrupted Billy's forced assurance of delight at the latter prospect, "to put that one across on me." Mrs. Matthews' vocabulary took its own wherever she found an expression she liked. "Don't I know

Burke well enough to know you? He'd rather be eaten alive by cannibals than to have women come down to his rooms for tea or to dinner."

Billy took advantage of a pause just here to assure her that he was not worthy of any such attention.

"Come, now," she ignored what he was trying to say, giving expression to his gratitude. "Are you still sick?"

"Sick?" He threw his heavy disgust of ill-health into the violent way he echoed her over the 'phone. "No, I'm not sick, but the fact is, that fall down South was a nasty one. I've got a sprained ankle and a collar bone that won't behave —"

"I see," she said. "Low spirits, that's all. Then," taking it for granted, "you will come?"

He begged her pardon.

"You don't understand, eh? You're to come to-night to dinner, just a home dinner with us and Evadne. Maybe one or two more. We'll go to the theater afterwards."

When he tried to squirm out of the invitation, she laughed.

"Oh, well," she said, "if you are too proud and vain to let your old friends see you limp a little, maybe you'd rather we all came there to have dinner with you? You could have a throne seat arranged to sit on, and each of us will come prepared to do some parlor trick to amuse you. But you must have diversion."

She knew that prospect would bring him to terms. It did.

"Come along early," she told him. "You can tell me about Burke before dinner." She rang off. Grady observed that the room was a "thrifle gayer, even a 'phone message helpin'."

Billy Rutledge knew in the beginning that it wasn't going to be "just a home dinner and Evadne," as Mrs. Matthews had said. Truth to tell, home dinners came precious seldom in this metropolitan household. But the promised Evadne was there, very much so, even before she swam into the drawing-room. Mrs. Matthews was waiting for him when he arrived. She gave him what news she had of her brother, which was only that he had wired Christmas greetings and announced his own good health.

Mrs. Matthews was trying to extract from Billy something about the girl with whom her brother was in love. "So you won't even tell me her name," she mused thoughtfully, "though I know perfectly well that you know all about her and are withholding it from some archaic chivalry that most men have put away these days." She resumed her narrative of Evadne.

He remembered Evadne? Well, at first she had been sick with apprehension. A *débutante* girl on one's hands was such a responsibility, but Evadne had caught on. She was popular. Here Mrs. Matthews hesitated.

Of course, she babbled on, so very many things enter these days into a girl's popularity. Now, some of the men who had paid her the most marked attention were not from every point of view exactly desirable; those that had money seldom had birth, and so it went. But Evadne had been a success. Evadne must show him her Christmas presents, and then he could see for himself. Mrs. Matthews had no way of knowing that Billy disliked girls who showed gifts or who paraded the attentions shown them by other men. He was very old-fashioned in some of his feelings; if he hadn't been, he would have divined just here what was most obvious — that the cherished Evadne was being fairly thrown at his head by his hostess.

Of course, he never suspected anything like this, for Mrs. Matthews was confiding to him her disappointment over her brother not falling in love with her little protégée.

"I had it all planned out in my mind," she was saying. "Evadne would be just the wife for Burke. He needs a New York woman to polish off that Colorado roughness. Come, now, won't you tell me, who's he loving?"

Hanged if he knew. Billy's eyes were wells of truth. Anyway, he wouldn't have made any confidence just now if he had felt at liberty to do so, for other guests were arriving and cocktails were being passed. Also,

the fair Evadne pervaded the place. Mrs. Matthews did a disappearing turn; Billy found himself renewing acquaintance with a full-blown young woman, very self-possessed, in contrast to the little white débutante he had last seen at the Opera.

"And they sang *Lohengrin* that night," Miss Saulsbury recalled, lifting the cocktail to her lips and her heavy-lidded eyes to his.

The word was a magic pass. Something—was it Somebody?—obstructed the passage of the cocktail as he started to lift the glass to his lips. Did he want this cocktail, a laughing voice asked him; did he want it? Wouldn't he rather —

Miss Saulsbury, standing so near, somehow seemed very far away, though he heard her inane question, something about the weather. (What did he care about the weather?) The amber liquid in her glass had almost disappeared. He heard himself murmur an "oh, certainly," — a perfectly safe reply at all times.

Wouldn't he rather — (was he actually hearing a voice of enchantment silent these many weeks?) — *kiss her?* He held the cocktail glass foolishly and looked at it, while he telegraphed out into space — whether near or far he didn't know — but he telegraphed back ecstatically that she *knew* he had. That of course he didn't want a cocktail if he might kiss *her!* Then he laughed behind his outer face because quick came her message back:

that if he liked, he might have the *cherry*! But he left even that.

Mrs. Matthews, distributing dinner partners, didn't observe that he left his glass as he received it. But the stute Evadne did and she wondered.

Dinner moved toward dessert and coffee and cigarettes. Billy heard himself making conversation and joining in the mirthless laughter, but inwardly he was late and taking no part in anything about him. She had passed, it was true. He left her in the drawing-room. He knew she wasn't even there any more. Had he been there? Well, no, he had to concede that she hadn't actually been there, but a message is a message. He had sent a message by her voice, her own voice. Oh, he had not forgotten, after all!

And Evadne smoked, and all the women smoked. Billy turned his face away. His little girl in the blue gown—he was glad she wasn't here. She didn't smoke. Oh, except of course to be companionable with him occasionally she might smoke a cigarette, and she always was going to light his pipe. He'd encourage her to do that. It made for such good chances to slip in kisses.

The woman on his right, in glass bugles and black velvet, was telling him about rat-baiting, what sport it was. "The men at the club"—she explained what hunting club—"hire the farmers' boys to catch the rats, premium on every rat brought alive to the club. Then

they are kept in the pit, — all this is a great secret, you know," she paused to warn. "Nobody outside our own set knows about it; then there's a grand killing."

Billy Rutledge listened, at least she thought he was listening; but his real inner ears weren't being polluted with anything so disgusting. Instead he was thinking of his dream-girl's kisses. For instance, day was joined to night just as a pearl pendant is to its chain by a tiny gold link; so his days would be joined to his nights each day to each night, by one of her kisses. Then, in the morning, when it was time for another day to be joined to last night, it had to be connected somehow, well, that would be another link needed, and each of her kisses would be a link.

"That makes fifty, doesn't it?" his neighbor asked and he said foolishly, "Why, no, it's not but two!"

"Two what?" she asked and regarded him steadily. He blushed and stammered, and she repeated: "I said I killed twenty-five rats, and ten rats and fifteen rats last Saturday. Doesn't that make fifty my score altogether?"

"Of course," he agreed, "but you're the first woman I've ever seen who could manage more than two and two at a time. You're a human adding machine. You reproach me. I always count on my fingers."

In the box at the theater they put him next to Evadne and it was very dispiriting. He soon discovered that

he wasn't a self-entertainer like his lady in the glass
goggles and black velvet. And Mrs. Matthews had
placed herself as a sounding board. When he lapsed in
his efforts to please Evadne, his hostess prodded him
gently mentally and led him back to his duty. And
Evadne's admirers invaded the box, and they quite
crowded his private dream out. He felt trapped himself.
He couldn't escape.

But they'd never trap her, his little girl in blue! He
smiled inwardly at his fancy. She was elusive as a
moonbeam, as intangible as the fragrance that envel-
oped her. It wasn't anything more definite than a
fragrance, a kind of spirit fragrance at that, and very
far removed from these hot perfumes from overdressed
women in the box. The fragrance of his dream-girl was
removed from anything even so obvious as a sweet smell.
The lights were off again and the curtain went up.
There was a momentary hush over the house. The
play, a gorgeous riot of Eastern color and barbarism,
diverted him. It was a day in the ancient city of Bag-
dad, and with a curiously impersonal detachment, Billy
Rutledge lost himself in the seething multitude of the
market place. He was captivated by the fancy of the
man who set all the motion and life of Bagdad to the key
of one woman's dream of love, to one man's passionate
yearning that some wondrous wizard passing by would
charm to silence his misery of incompleteness. The

Veiled Woman and the Man on the Roof near enough to touch but neither seeing the other, though their voices went up in a blended prayer :

“O thou Bestower of all things, bestow
This benediction on thy servants low,”

touched Billy Rutledge curiously. He saw them not as fantastic figures in a poet's tale, not as personal entities at all, but as dismembered spirits, each lacking completeness until divinely guided to the affinity in the other.

Mrs. Matthews folded her program into a curious little fan and laughed knowingly.

“‘The Maiden Manifest,’” she mused aloud; “isn't this deliciously true to life? Isn't the maid intended for every man always manifest to all eyes except his blinded ones? Don't you think so, Billy Rutledge?”

He laughed the question away idly. But Mrs. Matthews was not to be so easily diverted.

“‘I hearken with my heart upon the ground,’” she hummed softly from the program. “That's the average man exactly. He's listening for Her footsteps; for the day of days when she will arrive, and the same old situation is always before us. ‘The Maiden Manifest indeed! Who's so blind as he who will not see?’”

A soft, bald-headed man back of the hostess cackled out something about the average man waiting for the ideal girl's coming. Billy Rutledge felt a sudden and very great need of fresh air. It rushed over him that

Mrs. Matthews was thinking, "Thou art the man for Evadne." He could almost hear her thoughts. He knew that he wasn't; his heart was beating high with a very real terror. He had the Western horror of being marauded.

He escaped from supper, promising to come again on to "just a home dinner with us and Evadne." He couldn't hear of their dropping him at his down-town quarters.

The lobby of the theater was filled with men he knew. Two months ago he would have lingered here, making the more unit in the crowd which appreciated him as its own. To-night every welcoming hand laid detainingly on him seemed a sort of impertinence. He had nothing to do with them, nothing to say to the crowd in the lobby of a Broadway theater.

"To the park, and keep away from the crowd," he told the chauffeur, as he crawled into a taxicab. There was no crowd. The hour was one sacred, along Broadway, to supper. Two hours later the park would be busy with taxis and motor cars. Billy Rutledge would not have approved of any girl he knew going for a taxi ride in Central Park with a young man after midnight, unchaperoned. Certainly not! But those others were the kind that brought Broadway with them to the park. He and his dream-girl were riding to leave Broadway far behind.

He had a feeling that she would come back, once they were away from people. She wouldn't come to the dinner; it was an elfin trick of hers to send the message of her voice, to tease him as she had teased him that far-off night when she sang to him and disappeared. He laughed at the childishness of her. Mrs. Matthews couldn't have made her stay at her dinner! Mrs. Matthews' soft, fat men guests, the women, Mrs. Matthews herself, with all her good qualities, — his dream-girl eluded them because they weren't her kind of people.

Her kind of people! Billy Rutledge tried to think who would be her kind of people. Nobody that he knew here. Somehow she seemed far off, very remote from the New York he knew. Maybe she was *in* New York. But he knew that she wasn't *of* New York. Out here, in the cold air, under the hard, little northern stars, with the city's roar far away, Billy Rutledge knew she was coming.

She'd be here any minute now. He'd turn, and there she would be, sitting beside him, very still and silent listening — what was it she always seemed to be listening to hear? Anyway, she'd be here close beside him, infinitely companionable. She understood everything. That was her first charming appeal. Maybe to-night she'd slip her thrilly little hands deep down into his great pocket (silly muffs don't ever get anybody's hands really warm; now his deep pockets were warm)

he'd slip her hands deep down into them and then she'd laugh that tinkly little laugh of hers, because he'd be so surprised when she let him hold them. There wouldn't be any need to talk. They'd ride on and on, with the chilling cold air in their faces, and her sweet eyes would tell him things that her lips withheld.

The air was keen and invigorating. The lake was frozen and the whole park deserted. The taxicab meter ticked off the minutes and the miles as golden, but Billy Rutledge took no thought of his diminishing riches. And the pity of it—for She didn't come after

"I've never carried a more soberer park fare the night after Christmas." The chauffeur turned his head back over his shoulder when he left Billy at his door in Gramercy Square. "'Tis extraordinary luck." It takes a good deal of money to impress a New York chauffeur, but this one was satisfied with his night's earnings.

"Get yourself off to bed." Billy roused Grady who was waiting up for him, sound asleep. "Haven't I told you never to sit up for me? It's as bad as being married." Many a night Billy had sat up with Grady when pneumonia and fever came as the natural aftermath to the rescue from starvation and exposure on Denver park benches. Grady could not sleep in bed with his master out.

The faithful henchman grinned at Billy's abuse of him for sitting up.

"Ye're worth more than a lousy little Irishman likes itself sittin' up fur," he said. "Ye're worth a real woman's worry. And I do be hopin', sir," he hesitated before he ventured the remark, for he had never yet dared anything so personal. "I do be hopin', sir, that ye'll be finding Herself soon, sir."

"Thank you, Grady." The young man took the wish very simply, very gratefully. "And good night."

"'I do be hopin','" he repeated, as the retreating steps sounded far down the hall, "'that ye'll be finding Herself soon, sir.' And so do I, Grady. So do I *Herself!*"

If She had only been waiting here for him to-night in the sweet detachment of this hour from all other hours in Time's calendar. This little hour, an island hour, just for the two of them, in the great ocean of Eternity. Ah, if She were here to listen, while he poured out, in a flood of words, all that was dammed up in his heart, waiting for the only one to whom he could say it — *Herself*. The pity of it — She didn't come!

In the old days, when he and Burke Preston had bunked in a cabin on the mountain side in Colorado they had fallen into the habit of repeating passages from favorite books when the day's work was done — or rather attempted, for at that time the day's work wasn't

ever done, since no day brought them the reward they sought. They would lie on their bunks of green fir branches, turned in for the night, declaiming orations, singing snatches of happier day melodies, even reciting poetry.

“‘But God will bring those who shall have believed and done the things that are right’” — across the years floated back Burke Preston’s voice in his favorite passage from the Koran — “‘into gardens ’neath which the rivers flow.’”

Billy Rutledge’s eyes were tender. He could hear his friend’s booming voice as he repeated the lines for their noble beauty. In those days their own dream of a gold mine might well seem to some to be as visionary as the desert Sheik’s dream of a cool and watered garden.

“Haven’t we believed, Bill, old man?” he could hear Burke reducing it to a personal equation of comfort; “and haven’t we done ‘those things we think are right’? Sure, then, if we put it up to Allah to make it a gold mine instead of a garden ’neath which rivers flow, why couldn’t the change be effected?” — “‘Adorned they shall be with golden bracelets,’” Burke would intone, mixing his own philosophy with that of the desert, “for I do hereby believe and solemnly know what my common sense tells me is true: that anybody can have anything he wants if he only wants it long enough and hard

enough. All ends work to one end to the Immortal Gods."

Billy Rutledge wondered if it were true. Certainly their dream had been materialized. Allah had made it a gold mine instead of a garden 'neath which rivers flow. But a girl — The Girl — was so infinitely removed from either. Could wanting her like this, with every fiber in his being, every moment of his life so long as breath stayed in his body — could that help him to find her?

Oh, the pity of it! She didn't come, and the days ran along and made weeks, and the weeks crystallized into a month — and she gave no indication that she was ever coming back. Billy Rutledge despised himself for staying sick, but he couldn't get well.

CHAPTER XI

PROMISES — AND PEACH BLOSSOMS

“What say you?

Can you love the Gentleman?”

— *Romeo and Juliet.*

“DON’T you think,” Cissy put the question thoughtfully to the Governor of Georgia, “that blue must be God’s favorite color?”

“If angels are permitted to know the preferred shades,” he replied gallantly, “you are probably right.” He was watching her as she swayed to and fro in a hammock in the sunshine on the broad gallery of the Gardner place, where both were house guests now of three weeks’ standing.

“Well, the sky is blue; did you ever see it so blue as it is to-day?” As she stretched slim arms over her head, Cissy’s lacy sleeves fell back to the sunshine’s caresses. “On all happy days it is blue, isn’t it?”

“It is,” he agreed, flicking cigar ashes idly aside.

“And the most beautiful waters are blue,” she continued; “the Bay of Naples and at Honolulu. You told me how the waters there reminded you of sun shining on a peacock’s breast.”

"I asked you to come with me and see," he reminded.

She ignored the drift of his remarks. "And the prettiest flowers are blue," she continued; "forget-me-nots and violets, gentians and —"

"Your eyes," the Governor of Georgia suggested quietly.

Cissy evinced a sudden interest in a sleek black hen that had squeezed through the whitewashed picket fence from the back yard preserves on to the broad side lawn on which the gallery gave. "Did you ever notice," she digressed, "how very seldom one sees a hen or a cat or anything absolutely black, without a white spot somewhere?" Cissy had developed a most overwhelming interest in the lopsided fowl. She called on him to help her to decide whether she was a game or a houdan. As a matter of fact, it was neither, but a mongrel fowl that had escaped from the fattening coop.

The Governor shied his cigar butt at the interesting black hen and lit another cigar, very thoughtfully. His eyes were upon the girl in the hammock, leaning far over its side to observe the maneuvers of the black intruder. Cissy in a flowered dimity morning dress, all foamy with lace and suggesting faint-tinted lingerie ribbons, mirroring the roses cunningly made of silk that dangled from a breakfast cap, made a pretty picture. This was *her* gallery, she had told him when he came out half an hour earlier to join her after breakfast, and Polly had given

orders that she must not be disturbed. In reply to his question if she had anything to do, she had answered: "Certainly, I have to swing in the sunshine and plan my whole life. I'm busy on it every morning."

He laughed, and the remark had given him the opportunity to declare that it was just along these lines he wished to advise with her. He knew that Cissy well understood that he had tried repeatedly this last week to get her away from the others. Ordinarily it would have been easy enough, but she had developed such elusive qualities these past few days that he wouldn't have been surprised to see her disappear before his very eyes. And he was a busy man, much too busy to be lingering around house parties.

"Are you going to listen to what I have to say this morning?" he asked. "Last night you promised —"

There was a sudden squawk from the hen, as she gulped down the still burning cigar, after picking at it curiously from all sides.

"Oh!" cried Cissy, with quick sympathy, "she's burned her tongue on that nasty old cigar you threw away. Why didn't you put it out?"

The Governor of Georgia strode to the other end of the gallery. He was angry. Cissy swayed to and fro in the hammock. Mrs. Gardner and all the other guests had driven to the golf links for the morning. Cissy and the Governor were to follow in the phaeton,

and even now it was time for the phaeton to be brought around. The Governor walked to the far end of the veranda and stood surveying the surrounding country, but not thinking of the place he held in the hearts of his countrymen. The best-loved man in Georgia was now feeling himself the least loved.

Cissy was still deeply interested in the ancient hen as she scratched, for the first time undisturbed, in the sacred precincts of a Southern "front yard." To-day everything seemed engaged with straw. In the Marshal Niel roses that clambered about the immense fluted white pillars of the gallery, sparrows were busy bringing straw and material for a nest. From a nearby cedar tree a mocking bird showered his liquid music while his mate fetched straw.

Cissy stretched her bare arms toward the sea of blossoming trees in the orchard. It was set on a hill slope that ran down to the river below. How beautiful it was! She sighed with a pagan joy in the sunshine and the happy home noises about her. All was very well with the world. She had come to realize that she had been hasty in leaving Bayside, but she didn't regret it. These weeks in southern Georgia had been ideal. She had had time to reconsider, and something told her that Clothilde, with her careless acceptance of all things and her readiness to jump at any conclusion, might have been mistaken. She swayed to and fro in her hammock.

Of course she was to blame, for she had known before Billy Rutledge whispered the tender endearments before he lost consciousness how things were with him. She knew he loved her, with that clairvoyance that is the angels' gift to women, and she was content to wait. Time would prove all things, and life was good, swaying in the sunshine. The only jarring note was the wrath of the Governor of Georgia. Cissy stole a glance at him now out of the tail of her eye. He was quite at the far end of the gallery, reading a paper, puffing furiously away on another half-spent cigar. His back was turned as much as it is possible for a gentleman-born to ignore the presence of a lady, and he had apparently forgotten her existence.

Cissy regarded him long and earnestly, trailing her beribboned sleeve and trying to catch a rose that came almost within her grasp when she swung outward. She caught the rose and deliberated whether to offer it as a truce or not.

"Do you know," she made an overture to his gray, broad, cheviot shoulder, "what you remind me of — looking at you from here? Don't move," as he stirred and turned.

He made some reply that sounded in transit like a cigar-smoke "No."

"Like Vesuvius," she announced. "'Gray walls rising sheer to perpendicular heights, surmounted by

snow-capped peaks (the Governor's hair was prematurely gray), from which a thin spiral of blue smoke may be seen on the clearest day.'"

The Governor cleared his throat. "I am glad," he said with dignity, "I afford you amusement."

"Sitting in that position," she continued, "you look exactly like a picture in a geography I used to study at the convent. You haven't quit smoking, have you?" she inquired a moment later, as the smoke ceased to ascend in a thin spiral heavenward.

No reply. He was very deep in his paper.

Cissy examined a freckle on the pink satin of her arm and plaited her long fingers and whistled to the sparrows, who had departed after another supply of straw. Even the black hen had disappeared. Maybe it was her first cigar.

"I hope," said Cissy to the Governor, who threw aside the paper with sudden impatience, "that you didn't read something in that paper that displeased you — about yourself."

His reply was unintelligible, albeit perfectly courteous.

"Once I knew a reporter on a paper," Cissy said.

"You did?" perfunctorily.

"I don't think they kept him reporting," she continued; "he did the police news and murders. You might read columns that he'd write about a dreadful murder without being able to tell who had been killed."

her reminiscences amused her more than they did her audience. "The last time I saw him he told me they'd taken him off the murders and put him on the political side of the paper." There was no apparent indication that this politician was interested in the subsequent fate of her young reporter friend.

"I was wondering the other day if he wrote something read about you in the *Atlanta Constitution*," she persisted. "The article in question said you were arbitrary and always wanted to carry your own point with a high hand."

She waited for him to affirm or deny the charge. In sitting up she dropped a pillow from under her head.

"Thank you." She caressed him with her eyes, as she restored it to a place in the hammock.

"Oh, look," breathed Cissy, with a new note in her voice, a sudden change of beauty in her eyes. "Look at the orchard from here, Governor!" He had almost relented.

"It's a pink automobile veil that some fairy slipped down last night," she said, "to spread over those ugly bare trees. It's fastened down, isn't it, with little emerald stickpins in the shape of leaves. Just the kind of souvenirs that Juliette LaPice gave her bridesmaids in November. It's nothing but a pink chiffon veil."

"A peach orchard in bloom in January," the Gov-

ernor replied with grave reproach, "always reminds me somehow of a woman's promise. You can never depend on either." He stopped for the shaft to sink in.

"Promises and peach blossoms," Cissy repeated after him; "is that the old saying? I have heard it. What is it?" Her slim fingers tapped at her forehead with a pretty gesture she had in an attempt to recall the quotation.

"You are thinking of promises and pie crust," he told her. "They are proverbially easily broken, I believe." His eyes gravely accused her.

"What did I promise?" meekly.

"That you would listen —"

"Heah de hoss and buggy," small Ahab announced, turning the corner of the gallery in the drive below. "I hadder grease de kerridge, das huccome hit tuk me so long ter git heah."

"Well, I'll listen now," Cissy promised, as he lifted her into the low phaeton and put the top back, "if you drive down by the post office and take the river road. I don't want to see any golf links. It makes me tired even to drive by them."

He gathered up the reins, all his good humor restored. His eyes were cheerful and very tender. He was thinking, as the big horse trotted leisurely down the white hill and a little wind came up from the river, that the day must be one of God's special efforts. It

was a blue day, as blue and tender and young as Cissy's eyes, long-lashed and brown-shadowed, lifted to meet its own.

He turned out of the drive into the "big road." And Cissy told him as soon as they got the mail he must go back into some other "little road" if he wanted her to drive with him. She knew a little road that wound round and dropped into a dogwood forest.

Come to think of it, they could go that way to the post office and get the mail on the way home. And right here was the place to turn in.

Cissy was gay as the day itself. Did he know the Irish poem about the little roads of Cloonagh? Well, he would teach it to him. The horse jogged along under a white canopy of dogwood blossoms, and Cissy began to repeat the verses:

"The grand road from the mountain goes shining to the sea,
And there's traffic in it and many a horse and cart,
But the little roads of Cloonagh are dearer far to me,
And the little roads of Cloonagh go rambling through my heart."

He didn't know she was Irish. She wasn't, she told him, but she loved Irish poetry.

"A great storm from the ocean goes shouting o'er the hill,
And there is glory in it and terror on the wind,
But the haunted air of twilight is very strange and still,
And the little winds of twilight are dearer to my mind."

And the last verse she sang to him while she flicked at a horsefly with the whip, — a horsefly that had accompanied them from the other road in the hope of getting a good meal from the horse's fat back. Cissy's whip described a projecting circle as she sang :

“The great waves of the Atlantic sweep storming on their way
Shining green and silver with the hidden herring shoal,
But the little waves of Breffny have drenched my heart in
spray,
And the little waves of Breffny go stumbling through my
soul.”

The Governor of Georgia was getting ready in the manner of politicians who have an important communication to make, to deliver his message. Cissy's bright hair shone uncovered in the sunshine, filtering through the trees. Just then they drove out from the leafy arbor. She made a little roof with her hands over her eyes, to follow the flight of a buzzard circling far aloft in the blue.

“Don't you ever envy a buzzard, Governor?” she asked contentedly. “Their lives are so absolutely — irresponsible !”

CHAPTER XII

NO MAN IS WORTH A TEAR

“Ah, woe is me; woe is me;
Alack and well a-day;
For pity, sir, find out that bee
Which bore my love away.”

— *Mad Maid's Song.*

Cissy gazed long and thoughtfully at her reflection in the mirror as she dressed for the ball that night. Yes, she was pale, as she leaned nearer to scrutinize the lovely image of herself. Her eyes were weary-looking, but Elly had assured her times without number that weariness only made her eyes the more beautiful. Now the lids with their purple shadows looked as if they had passed under the darkening touch of a Turkish beautifier. The bronze lashes swept a cheek that refused to grow pink even under the applied stimulant of eau de cologne, impatiently massaged in.

“Maria,” she turned to her black tirewoman, “I don’t feel like dancing to-night. Don’t I look ill?”

“Naw’m, Miss Cissy,” Maria’s fat shoulders shook at the idea of her young mistress looking ill. “I a’t nevah saw you look bettah, honey.” She went back to her task of laying out the party clothes.

"But I am pale," Cissy spoke to her reflection. "I have even less color than usual."

"Whyncher put some paint on yo' cheeks, den?" Maria inquired. "Jes' now, when I wuz comin' through de hall, Miss 'Ginia Givens she called me in dar ter fasten her dress, an' I seed her jes' soppin' it on her'n. All uv 'em paints, cepen you."

Cissy sighed and wearily put down an ivory and gold hand mirror.

"Maria, if I could put a little rouge on my heart," she said, with the surety of one who makes a confidence to ears that cannot comprehend its meaning, "I'd be more in a party frame of mind."

"Want me ter go borry some frum Miss 'Ginia fer you?"

Cissy picked up an envelope hid under the débris of powder puffs, manicure implements, scent bottles and hair pins which littered the dressing table. Maria waited for instructions to go for the suggested rouge. Finally she repeated the question.

Cissy shook her head. She was deep in a letter that had come from Clothilde earlier in the day. Maria asked the third time almost timidly:

"Miss Cissy, you gwine wear de pale blue dress? Y'ain't had it on since dey sонт it home from de cleaners'."

Cissy turned on her sharply, which was manifestly unfair. The letter's contents, and not Maria's gentle

questioning, had put her into an unusual state of petulance.

"No, I'm not." She raised her voice for the first time to the maid who adored her. "I think I shall never wear blue again, Maria —" Her hair tumbled in waves of bronzed gold over her bare shoulders. She leaned over and laid her head on the dressing table to wipe the sudden tears that welled up into her eyes.

"Miss Cissy, honey!" The next moment the same loving head was pillowed on the motherly breast that had soothed its childish woes and comforted its school-girl tragedies. A black velvet hand stroked the waves of gold and begged her young mistress not to cry. "What's the matter, Mattah? Mammy's own li'l lamb —"

"There, there, lock that door," Cissy drew back quickly, as feminine steps sounded down the long hall. It might be any of those half-dozen Mobile girls that she scarcely knew, or Virginia Givens coming to ask if she had too much paint on the lobes of her ears, or even Belle Lewis. None of them should see her cry. Maria hastened to turn the key in the lock. The steps passed by.

"Come on, Maria, and brush my hair," Cissy wiped her eyes and turned over another page of the letter. "There's nothing the matter. I just got a gnat in my eye. Come on. I'm not crying, you old goose!" Maria took her cue instantly. "Law, honey, I

knowed you warn't. De ain't no man in de world wuth er tear."

"Who said anything about a man?" Cissy demanded testily. "Maria, if you think I was crying about a man instead of the gnat I told you I got in my eye, I'll—I'll discharge you, Maria!" This was the most terrible threat ever held over the head of the faithful Maria. "You think I'm gwine 'spute dat gnat bein' in y eye," she wheedled, beginning her ministrations with the brush, "when I seed him when he flewed in de honey?"

Cissy unfolded the letter and found the passage that had moved her to tears. Maria's sharp eyes over her shoulder followed her young mistress's gaze, as she made her way through closely written pages with marginal decorations of vinelike postscripts. If Maria had held the key to unlock these mysterious cabalistic signs, she would have had confirmed her forbidden suspicion that some man was in the letter. Indeed, Maria had her own idea of life. She had never seen a woman white or black, weep tears that didn't in some way go back to—some man.

Even now she wouldn't have dared tell herself her own suspicions, but she knew the man was "Mars Billy." Maybe this letter was saying he had died. It was from Miss Clothilde; she recognized the blue paper and Miss Clothilde's handwriting.

It was from Clothilde, the first letter she had written since Cissy flew so precipitately away and left them in confusion and despair. Clothilde's first pages were rambling excuses why she hadn't written before. She leisurely retraced the events of the first days after Cissy left. Cissy was skipping this part as she had done earlier in the day. Also she only glanced through Clothilde's hurt reminder that once she had said Bay-side was not dull, — that she loved to stay there. But Clothilde supposed since Cissy had grown tired so soon of them this time that maybe she wouldn't keep her promise to come back for February. Cissy impatiently threw this section aside, also. Here was the page for which she sought.

"Billy has returned to New York. I am glad and in a way sorry. He wasn't able to travel. Dr. Martin forbade him to go, but, my dear, his words were so much idle wind. He got up out of the bed, with high fever, and left, bag and baggage, and neither Bob nor I were able to make him listen to reason. Dr. Martin says he is sure to have a relapse. Neither the broken collar bone nor the ankle had reached the place in knitting back, — I think that's what he said, — to risk what Billy took upon himself in getting up.

"But for myself I am rather glad he has gone. He had fever for three days after you left and in his delirium he simply raved about that girl in New York. He reproached himself with being unfaithful to her, — with leaving New York. As you know I was responsible for his coming South, this wasn't particularly cheerful for me to hear. Going back to her seemed the only way. He never told Bob her name; if he did I have not been able to prevail

upon him to tell me. But he did tell him that first night he came about being engaged to this wonderful person who had made a man of him. They had just got things fixed up when Billy came South, and then everything seemed to get in a tangle.

"I have never seen a man so infatuated, if I may judge by the way he carried on in his delirium. He is simply crazy about her. He raved about her in a blue dress, about her singing to him, and begged her to sing to him again. I think she must be an actress. It is all too mysterious for me to fathom. Bob has shut up like a clam, though I am positive Billy told him all about her.

"I know you will be amused by this. I think Billy did fall about half an inch deep in love with you, Cissy. He kept telling her that he wasn't in love with you. That he was the only man in the world who didn't want to marry you. But that he cared nothing in the world for any one except her. Oh, I can't tell you a hundredth part he *did* say —"

Cissy crumpled the letter in a damp ball. It was wet with her tears. The only man in the world who didn't want to marry her! He cared nothing for her! When Clothilde had told her that night of the accident about the girl in New York, Cissy's first impulse had been followed, to flee from him. She did not know how much he had heard of her grief over him, when supposedly dead. Neither could she bear to think of the man who loved another girl remembering the words of love she had whispered to him. She had argued it out that by going away she would show him he was nothing to her. Accordingly she had left.

But once away, her common sense counseled her not to jump at such hasty conclusions. What if Clothilde

were mistaken about the other girl? She herself knew how Clothilde got things mixed. And Cissy had her own heart to plead the cause of Billy. Her wise little heart told her he loved her; that he himself had been perilously on the brink of telling her — even on the train before he knew who she was. Cissy was woman enough to know when she was beloved. However adept a woman may be in hiding her affection, no man ever lived who could conceal his love from its object.

“Ain’t I breshed ernuff ter begin puttin’ it up, Miss Cissy?” Maria ventured, with a cautious glance at the clock on the mantel. Below she could hear the negro musicians beginning to tune their instruments, and carriage wheels were crunching on the graveled drive. Maria knew it was time Miss Cissy was getting dressed.

“Brush on until I tell you to stop.” Here was a page of Clothilde’s letter, scribbled in pencil, which she had overlooked.

“I don’t know how it is going to come out, but I am positive that no woman with the rind of a heart could resist that boy. If they do marry, of course he will bring her to Bayside to see his people and for us to see her. As soon as I hear I will let you know. If the wedding is to be soon, and I know if Billy had a word in the matter it will be — they will probably be here by the time you promised to come — in February. We’ll give them a house party that will go down in the annals of the county. Bring Polly Gardner home with you to help us plan everything out. If her husband

won't consent, bring her anyway. Bob will write to those dozen and fifteen men who are in love with you all over the country to come, too. By the way, what's this I hear you are doing to Governor of Georgia's heart . . . ?"

Her face was hidden under the silken cloak of hair, but now there was no attempt to conceal from Maria the fact that she was crying. That one, however, wise in her generation, gave no indication that she knew her mistress wept. Cissy pushed the tirewoman away and searched for her handkerchief. Maria busied herself finding hairpins and another brush. Cissy clinched her hands tightly and told herself that Bill Rutledge was nothing to her. That no girl with an atom of pride would let herself be reduced to — this. That it was beyond the understanding of even herself how any girl could cry because a man who cared nothing for her had gone off to make up with the girl he truly loved. Oh, how she hated him! Hadn't what Clothilde wrote in this letter spoiled this day?

It had been a nice day, all blue and gossamer clouds, peach blossoms and shining river, until Billy had clouded her horizon. Clothilde's careless confidence kept singing itself over and over in her ears. "He is the only man in the world that doesn't want to marry you." Well, it was justice, poetic justice, that the one man who didn't want to marry her should be the one man she loved.

She knew, however she might deny the truth to her heart, that she did love Billy Rutledge. It came to her, with the cruel sweetness of a dream that can never be realized, how near a hut, shared with him anywhere, would be to a palace. She was listening once again to him telling her about those Colorado dawns and moonlight; she saw once again love in his eyes when he looked at her. Then on the heels of it she remembered how strangely he had acted when she played that foolish Mother Goose song; how the music had made of him a different person, moody, self-absorbed, distant. Maybe then — why of course she might have thought of it before! — he had sudden recollections of that girl he left behind him in New York. A new pain shot through her heart at the memory of the day she had held his head on her lap and watched over him, seemingly dead.

It was her love and tears and kisses that had brought him back to life, and a whole year of wooing could not have held more than the single "Beloved" he whispered looking up into her face before he fainted again. At least the memory of that was hers to keep. And she would not forget if she would the words his eyes had tried to say even while consciousness left him. At least his sweetheart, the girl in the blue gown who sang to him in New York, could never take that away from her.

No, not that! Cissy leaped to her feet with new resolve! No, not that, — because she herself would fling it away here, and now! Who was Billy Rutledge that she should waste one precious teardrop for him? Again the mood that had taken sudden possession of her when she drove with the Governor of Georgia returned with its spiteful logic. It was this that had given her strength and courage to live through the awful morning after Clothilde's letter came. It was this that gave the Governor of Georgia the opportunity to make his suit, and it was this that gave him the answer that had intoxicated him with a joy whose permanency he feared to reckon on. Cissy seemed to come to a realization of the hour and its demands. She wouldn't have time possibly to write a letter to Clothilde now telling her the news. But after the party she could write and tell her. Then Clothilde, she knew, would send the news post haste on to Billy. Yes, she would show him! By the time he got back home with his bride she would be married to the Governor of Georgia!

"Maria," she commanded, "hot water for my face — and ice water! Could you tell I had been crying, Maria?"

"Naw'm, yo' eyes brighter'n evah," Maria lied nobly. "Even yo' cheeks done got some color in 'em now."

"Has my nose?" anxiously. "Pour more cologne in the bowl." She tested the water with pink finger-

lips. "Go borrow some rouge from Miss Virginia. No, I don't need it," as she caught a glimpse of her brilliant reflection in the mirror. "This cold water and the hot gives me enough color."

Maria sprayed the fragrant water on the flushed cheeks and alternated cold cloths with hot ones until traces of the tears were gone. Cissy sat as alert and beautiful as if a breaking heart were an organ she had only read about.

"Don't you see that I'm late?" she chided reproachfully. "Now, you'll have to hurry and get me dressed that much quicker." Already the responsibility for her delay was fastened on the shoulders of the faithful Maria, who went to work with alacrity to make up for lost time.

"Get out my pink dress, quick, and the slippers. Hurry, hur-ry, Maria! Can't you see what time it is?" She herself dived into a fragrant box and came up with pearl chains, a lace fan, a cobweb of a handkerchief and what looked like a spray of dewy peach blossoms for her hair. Cissy laid it against her bronze hair thoughtfully, and, deciding that it must be arranged low, she began her mysterious rites with the comb and brush and yellow hairpins.

She was slipping into a gown with swirling pink blossoms and lace, while Maria fastened a slipper.

"May I come in?" Mrs. Gardner's voice floated

from the other side of the door. "Cissy, everybody's come — and asking for you!" Maria had unlocked the door and admitted the hostess, who was flushed and triumphant in a spangled black gown. "Did you ever believe I could get down so slim as this?" all in a breath.

"Are you there?" Cissy made opera glasses out of her hands gayly. "It is the very wraith of Polly Gardner. Where's all your flesh, woman?"

Mrs. Gardner ignored this. Her plumpness was the shadow on her wall.

"My, but Cissy darling," she said, holding the girl at arm's length, "I'd never have believed my fondest dream."

"What?" Cissy encouraged. "Has your favorite dream been realized?"

"I've just been told," Mrs. Gardner glanced meaningfully about to indicate she could be trusted with a secret, "that you are engaged to the G-O-V-E-R-N-O-R." Maria picked up the trail of feminine garments, her keen old ears alert all the while. "He just told me under strictest vows of secrecy," Mrs. Gardner babbled on. "Weren't you going to tell me?"

"Yes," Cissy surveyed her coiffure deliberately with the hand mirror and adjusted a curl that dropped too much over one ear. "I was going to tell you, Polly — sometime."

"I told him," Polly laughed at the sheer joy of having a match she had planned shape itself so nicely to her wishes, "that he'd better not get the wedding suit until after the ceremony, so many have confided in me at various times the same secret with you in the dream in white satin. But, Cissy," growing more serious and turning the girl's face to look into her eyes, "upon my word, there's a new expression in your eyes, and this time I really believe you are going —"

"To m-a-r-r-y the G-o-v-e-r-n-o-r of G-e-o-r-g-i-a," Cissy clicked a bracelet about her slender arm, and without precedent she walked deliberately over and kicked a pale blue gown with jeweled girdle clear across the room. "I think so myself, Polly."

"Dey t'inks dey kin spell an' keep me frum knowin' whut dey say," Maria grumbled, as she put the room to rights half an hour later. "I know she gwine git married. Das whut Miss Polly say. She kin keep on spellin', but I sho' gwine fin' out de name uv de man she gwine marry whin I sees her marry him. An' das," with grim irony, "jes' 'bout soon as de bridegroom gwine know it his-se'ef!"

CHAPTER XIII

A PROMISE

“O waly, waly, but love is bonny
A little time while it is new,
But when 'tis auld, it waxeth cauld
And fades away like morning dew.”

SPRING is a gypsy maid that won't stay away from the South, even during the few months her half-brother Winter is supposed to reign. She slips back for week-end visits, bringing May weather, when, by the calendar, icicles are in order. In her train come flowers eager enough to get away from Proserpine's master in the cold regions below, — not always the idle flowers of the field and garden, but bud and blossom of fruit eager to be nipped, adventuring the chance with feminine daring.

With a woman's whimsical lack of reasoning she reckons not — or maybe she has a coquette's callousness to the effects of her smiles — what these pretty visits cost in the end. Every peach orchard that blossoms before the peach blossoms are due means that many dollars less to the unsentimental farmer, who is hoping the weather will turn cold and stay cold long enough to kill the worms. Perhaps it is because Spring, the gypsy, knows every sensible heart should be steeled against her com-

ing before Winter has been sped, that she brings the more blandishments; certain it is the real springtime itself is never so alluring, with April charm and fragrance, as these "warm spells in January and February."

The Gardner home, Oaklands, is so cunningly tucked away that a stranger dropped from an airship might reasonably enough suppose it far from the madding crowd. Really it is only a six hours' spin to Atlanta. Polly Gardner and her good-looking husband were giving to-night the annual holiday ball that has passed into traditionary observance since the first Gardner held a housewarming at the plantation.

The big old house sat on her hillside like a queen, resplendent in gems of many colors. Colored lights hung in a glowing chain from one stately oak to the next one. Broader streams of light came from the long French windows, and through the wide-open doors. The garden lay under no artificial light. The moon and stars illumined its winding walks and made a path of silver of the white-sanded path leading to the peach orchard. Polly Gardner turned to her husband with a sigh of relief. "Shelby," she whispered, "what Christmas angel of joy, do you think, kept the Middleton girls and their mother at home? With them away there isn't a wallflower on the place. We can enjoy ourselves, my son." They watched the dancers from the ballroom floor, too contented themselves to dance.

"Yonder's the Governor," Polly announced, beckoning to him with her fan. "Now you see that everybody keeps stirring," as he came up. "I'm going off to give some grandmotherly advice to that young gentleman."

She steered him to a small room under the stairs, opening out on a balcony. "Get a cigarette," she invited; "you may smoke — as well as confess. I must know it all before I can advise you how to bring it to a church climax."

"You don't think," his tone was anxious, "you don't think, Polly —"

"I daren't be too sure," she whispered. "But I will tell you this as a comfort. There has come a change over Cissy. I never saw the expression in her eyes there is to-night. For all I know maybe she is going to marry you. She told me she was."

"That's what makes me think she is going to do it," he replied simply. "She told me she would."

Polly Gardner laughed her easy-going little tinkle. "However did it happen?" she demanded. "If I had known, I'd have slipped on the mantle of invisibility and gone simply to take down the conversation. What did you say?"

"Hanged if I know," he confessed amiably. "I've made love to her every minute I have been with her these two weeks, and if she has heard one word I've

said she has given no indication. She was always promising some time to listen. But to-day, when I had quite despaired of ever getting her to hear, she simply turned around in the buggy and — said she'd marry me."

"And she wasn't joking," Mrs. Gardner added. "I never saw her more serious than she was to-night when she told me. But that's not getting down to what I asked you. Where were you when she accepted you? One step at a time; tell me the whole story."

The Governor, as directed, proceeded to tell her. It was a relief to tell Polly. Her woman's intuitions and subtlety had never failed him. If Polly assured him of Cissy's serious intentions, he felt that this vague uneasiness, the sense that the earth in his immediate vicinity would crumble and throw him from the heights of a newly accepted lover's bliss to the depths of his former despair at any moment, might be dismissed.

"We were driving down the river road," he was saying, "and by the post office. She got a lot of letters, and asked if I minded her reading the one from home. She hadn't finished it, skipping from page to page, when suddenly she crumpled it — and the next thing I knew she was engaged to me. Me, Polly!" The Governor's eyes shone with the light Polly Gardner had not seen in them for twenty years. She had been a friend of his first wife, and when he lost her a few months after they

were married, Polly Gardner's faithful heart had been torn by his hopeless grief. In the years since then he had risen high in his profession; the gubernatorial honors which he now held would be followed by another political honor that would take him to Washington. It was the thing for him to do — to marry. Polly had often told him so. She had faithfully aided more than one designing mother or widow who had laid siege to his heart, but the Governor had passed unscathed. Polly had not dreamed that anything would come of her plans to make a match between him and Cissy, advantageous and ideal though it appeared to her worldly-wise eyes. He had fallen desperately in love with Cissy at first sight. Now that they were engaged it was too good to be true!

"You don't think," he was saying anxiously, "that I'm too old for her? That it will be May wedding December, eh?"

"An old man's darling," she laughed deliciously; "Cissy ought to love the rôle, with you as Father Time."

"Seriously," he pleaded. "Tell me; I'm forty-five."

"And she's twenty," Polly returned. "You are the ideal age for her, my dear Gabe. If she is May, then in the sliding scale of the months you are September. May and September are ideally suited for long years of happiness."

"When May marries December," the Governor said

ly, "Cupid salts down another heart in his cold storage plant; haven't you observed it?"

"If that isn't like a man," she exclaimed impatiently. "Gabe Longshore, you've got precious little sense about some things, even if you are governor. Your path is simply mapped out before you — and here you are mooning as if you didn't know which way to go."

The Governor laughed indulgently. "Polly," he said, "the bridge that separates twenty from forty-five is a mighty frail structure. I'm afraid my clumsy old feet, walking backwards to where she is, will break the whole thing down."

"Get up from there," Polly commanded sternly. "Don't you hear that waltz? When a man hears music like that he makes love to any pretty girl who happens to be around. You get Cissy right now!"

Cissy Dalrymple waltzed with young Douglas Fitzgibbon and smiled up at him with an expression that made the Governor of Georgia grit his teeth — it was so unnecessarily tender. The Governor himself was rather stiff when it came to dancing. Twenty years ago he had found it exhilarating exercise; now he was deeply regretting that he had been "out" of the youthful diversions so long. Cissy loved to dance. He felt helplessly enough that he needed all his forgotten accomplishments and as many more as he could acquire to help him hold the affections of the im-

perious young person who had been his affianced wife ten hours.

His eyes followed the slim, laughing girl as she was whirled around the room by the youth who, maybe, was even now whispering love — how could he help it? — into her little ears. The Governor impatiently waited for the waltz to be finished.

“Miss Dalrymple has a prior engagement with me,” the Governor bore down on Cissy, who was surrounded by youths reminding her of promises to divide this dance or the next one.

“I had almost forgotten it,” she smiled wearily up at him. “No, I can’t dance any more with any of you to-night,” Cissy announced, including the circle in her change of plans. “I — I’ve promised the Governor to sit out all the dances with him.” She nervously tore her program, every dance on which was filled out, into tiny pieces. “I’m tired of dancing. My head aches—”

As they moved off, Douglas Fitzhugh linked an arm in Ned Warrington’s. “By Jove,” he confided, “at this rate, the best we’ll get is a chance to usher at the wedding.”

“Take me out into the air somewhere,” Cissy said. “Quick !”

He led her through the heavy fragrance of the garden. Her filmy skirts brushed the dew from incense-scented jonquils and violets that bordered the path leading to



Part 1
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the orchard. Cissy's step quickened into almost a run. "I want to get away," she said, "the lights hurt my eyes; the noise seems battering on my brain. Let's hurry away from it all."

On the Governor's arm hung her lace scarf. He was trying to put it about her bare shoulders.

"Put it around yours," she suggested hysterically, "if it's cool enough for a wrap. I'm burning up already. Let's go to the orchard!" She caught her breath softly.

Below, the tree tops formed a roof thatched with pink shingles of peach blossoms and moonlight. Above, the sky was an inverted pincushion of blue satin in which gleamed a million diamond pins, with a crescent moon of pearl in the west. The breeze from the river came laden with wild grape and the forest odors. Through it all ran, like a string on which the beauty of the world was threaded, the throbbing music from the dance room, the weird darky melodies, the gayest of which was built on a minor undertone of sadness.

The Governor led Cissy to the summerhouse on the bluff. Its covering was a winter honeysuckle, heavy with blossoms.

"Now," he said, steering her to the seat within, "isn't this something like? Cissy, you've given the last touch to a perfect day — sitting out all these dances with me. I'm a selfish dog to let you do it, darling."

Cissy had sunk down in rather a tired little heap.

Her head was propped on her hand, which rested on the back of the rustic seat. "Oh, I'm tired — tired," she exclaimed like a worn-out child, "tired of everything and everybody."

Now the Governor, being wise in his generation, did not launch the issue an ordinary lover would have at such a statement.

"Poor little girl," he comforted softly. And Cissy forgot she was engaged to him. He seemed, for the moment, just a good fatherly sort of person, the best buffer in the world to keep the others away. So when he drew her to him, her head rested on his shoulder in a deep content; and he waited for her to tell him what was the matter.

"You have never yet let me tell you," he finally reminded, "how I love you, Cissy. Have you forgotten your promise of the morning?"

"No," she stirred slightly against his coat sleeve. "I have not forgotten. I have been wondering all day — and now more than ever — why you or any one should care to marry me. I — I'm afraid, Governor, you are going to find me mighty — dull — when you know the real me."

The Governor's content returned. His doubts of earlier evening folded their wings and crept away. "Cissy," he said, "you have anticipated my own confession. I'm dull and old, but your love will renew my youth like an eagle's. You do love me a little, don't you?"

"Wait," Cissy stood outside of the place on the brink of the hillside. She raised her slim arms in the moonlight; the effect was not unlike that of a young priestess about to murmur an incantation. "I have something to tell you. It will make my head feel better maybe to let it off my mind. Let's walk while we talk.

"Please don't be too happy," she begged, "because of what I told you. I—I'm not worth being loved as you want to love me —"

"Cissy darling," he took her cold little hands in his own big warm ones, "what is troubling you; tell me."

"It's just this," Cissy began again. "I don't want you to give me more love than I deserve. I don't want to take in your heart the place you should keep for another. I—I know," her voice trembled, "how you loved the wife you lost. Polly told me and I don't want to take any of the love you gave to her —"

The Governor's eyes were moist. His wife was a name that not even his nearest and dearest friends yet dared to touch upon. She was a memory sacred, that he had never been able to divorce from his heart, his life, though she had been dead twenty years. But now Cissy spoke of her, and he understood what she was trying to say. He loved her the more for it.

"Cissy," he replied, "my dear little girl, I am not young, as I told you. The heart does not renew its early ecstasies; the dew of twilight is not the dew of

the morning. But I love you, child. You are the only woman I have ever loved since I lost her. Because I loved her then is no reason that I am able to give you less love now. You can't understand —"

Cissy's fingers curled about his own. "Don't say any more, please!" she begged. "I only told you that to help you understand what I am about to tell you now."

Back and forth they paced the shell walk. He waited for her to speak. The perfume-steeped garden, the music softened by the distance, the beauty of the world — and Cissy sunk in melancholy! The Governor's memory stirred to the words of a long-forgotten song:

"All that is bright must fade, — the brightest still the fleetest:
All that is sweet was made but to be lost when sweetest."

"Suppose you slip back into the house," he finally suggested, "and go to bed. It's because your head aches you feel so. Wait until to-morrow to tell me. I understand, *anyway*. It's all right, whatever it is."

"I suppose," Cissy remarked in a composed little voice, ignoring his solicitude about her head, "that you never had your heart broken by the only man in the world you could love" —

Could he be hearing aright? Cissy, his affianced bride, a lump in her throat, a pain in her heart, in these sad tones dwelling on a broken heart.

— "and have him go off without a thought about you — to marry another girl."

The Governor of Georgia was in the confession box, listening to words that threw a pall of black night over the garden, that struck a cruel discord in the throbbing music. He was beginning to see, to understand Cissy's strange conduct of the morning. Twenty-five years ago he had lived through the ecstasy and misery of first love.

"Poor little girl," he comforted softly. In her hurt, he forgot his own happiness was slipping away from him. "We'll make it all come out right. Don't think of me, except to tell me how I can help you. There never was a lover's quarrel that couldn't be patched up."

Cissy stood very erect in the moonlight.

"That is what I must tell you," she said bravely. "I loved a man who didn't love me. He told somebody that he was the only man in the world who didn't want to marry me. And I loved him enough to marry him." Her cheeks were aflame.

"That's impossible," the Governor exclaimed. "He couldn't have said such words. If there was a quarrel, a lover's quarrel, it will all blow over."

"There wasn't," she spoke now with a steady voice. "Not the least little misunderstanding. He simply didn't love me. That's the reason I said I would marry you."

"Oh!" The Governor whistled softly. "You mustn't think of marrying me — to spite him. I couldn't let you ruin your life, my child."

"Oh, I see," Cissy cried, hurt. "You want to break

the engagement. And you promised to marry me Governor!"

He had to smile in spite of the tragedy the moment held. "It isn't myself I'm considering at all," he replied, his handsome, honest face clouded. "I must put my own feelings aside to help you to your happiness, child."

"My happiness," she clicked her fan decisively, "depends altogether on you. Now that I have told you about *him* and made you understand I am not worthy of all the devotion you pour out of your eyes on me, I feel a great deal better. I had to empty my heart inside out for you to see before I could feel that I was treating you right. But I've put him out forever right here in this spot. And am I still engaged to you?"

There was a humility in the tones that he had never heard before. "Child," he whispered, "my love will hold you and keep you against the world."

"I haven't even told Polly or any living person about *him*, except you," she whispered. "Isn't that a very good sign I love you best, Governor?"

"It's sign enough to suit me," he answered happily. "Let's name the day to-night, Cissy."

"All right," she replied, her cheerfulness restored for the time being, "some Wednesday —"

"This Wednesday," eagerly, "next Wednesday."

"Some Wednesday," she corrected airily. "Some Wednesday when I get a lot of clothes!"

CHAPTER XIV

MORE LETTERS AND A NEW IDEA

“Oh, who would not welcome that moment’s returning
When passion first waked a new life through his frame,
And his soul, like the wood that grows precious in burning,
Gave out all its sweets to love’s exquisite flame.”

—MOORE.

OLD Pomp brought two letters from the post office several days later. Clothilde hastened to break the seal of the one bearing Cissy’s unmistakable chirography. Before she had finished the first page she called excitedly for Little Bob to get his pony and go after his father, who had gone hunting.

“Tell him to come home,” she instructed the child, “at once, as quick as he can get here; that I have something important to tell him.”

Her husband knew from experience just about how important what she had to tell him was. Nevertheless he hurried home. He found Clothilde excitedly watching for him.

“What do you think, Bob?” she greeted him, big and brown and handsome in his hunting things. “Guess who Cissy’s going to marry?”

“Is she married?” was his laconic reply.

"She's engaged," solemnly holding up the letter, "to the Governor of Georgia."

"Old Gabe Longshore!" Bob roared. "What a howling joke — on Gabe!"

"I see nothing to laugh at," his wife pouted. "I am going to be matron of honor and get a lavender gown to go with my old rose point and diamonds. Have you thought about it? I haven't worn either since we were married!"

"Madam," said Bob, severely, "is that a complaint against the dullness of country life and your husband?"

"You know it isn't," she reproached. "But if Cissy marries the Governor, we'll have to fix up a little, Bob."

"When Cissy marries the Governor of Georgia," Bob was unbuckling his cartridge belt, "I'll have diamond knobs put on the front door, honey."

"You are certainly not going to oppose it," Clothilde begged. "Think of living in the Executive Mansion. I always liked Atlanta society, if it weren't for the queer religions they talk about at dinners. Once I visited there, before I married."

Bob chuckled again. "Cissy and the Governor of Georgia," he repeated. "I wouldn't miss the sight for my next year's cotton crop, picked. In all his varied political career he has never been up against such a proposition as marrying her will be."

"Well, she's going to do it." Clothilde smoothed the letter complacently. "I've never seen the man who

could understand a woman marrying any other man! I'll read you part of what she says," unfolding the slim little missive. "Then you can see for yourself."

"Let's have it," Bob invited, dropping down into his big chair. "Lord, who will she get next? He's old enough to be her father."

The letter began with characteristic directness:

"Clothilde darling, you know how I have always hated young men and new houses. How often I have told you that I knew Fate was going to deal me a very youthful husband and we'd have to live in a little cottage! Well, now I know I shall never have to take either. I am engaged to the Governor of Georgia —"

"Whe-ew!" Bob whistled. "But how our taste does change. Cissy has simply walked through life on a carpet of college men's hearts. But Gabe isn't exactly in the class with Noah and Methuselah. Let me see. He's about forty-two —"

"Are you interested in hearing anything else she says?" said his wife, impatiently.

"Why, certainly I am," he assured. "I'm impatient to hear how she justifies her inconsistency. Read on."

"You're not interested in all she says," scanning the letter as a whole. "But listen to this; you see, Cissy has changed!"

"I'm very happy and contented. In fact I couldn't be happier. But this house party has convinced me that I am tired of society. Polly has a lot of nice people stopping here, and Shelby is as dear

as ever, but somehow nothing seems much fun any more. I suppose it's because I am 'settled' that everybody seems to bore me these days. Mary Belle Lewis is determined to come to Bayside. I believe she has written to you. Please don't invite her to return with me. This letter is to tell you I've changed my plans about going to Mobile and New Orleans. I think I shall come straight on back to Bayside. The Wilson girls are here from Mobile; by the way, they don't speak to me since they know about the Governor and myself. He's really too dear, Clothilde. Such a blessed relief after the other men who are here. I suppose they are very amusing, but I am tired of them from my head to my heels; even my heart would like to crawl off on a soft pillow somewhere in the dark and rest about three centuries. It will be lovely to be settled down with a good comfortable man like the Governor."

Bob was growing more interested. "Well, if this doesn't beat the Jews!" He finally burst out. "I pass!" Clothilde read on:

"You know his first wife died many years ago. I am so glad he is still in a way faithful to her memory. I couldn't think of marrying him if I didn't know what he really doesn't know that I know — that she was the one true love of his life."

"Isn't that the queerest thing for Cissy to say?" Clothilde wrinkled her brows in perplexity. "It's positively incoherent — the whole letter."

She waited for her husband to express an opinion.

"Is that all she says?" he asked.

"The rest of it is just messages for you and the children," she replied. "She says she may come back any day if we want her."

"If we want her!" he laughed. Then suddenly, "Didn't she send her regards to Billy?" He had opened the other letter, which bore the New York postmark.

"She didn't even ask about him," Clothilde said. "And I wrote her all about how ill he was and how he went off with high fever. I told her about the girl in the blue gown he raved about. Hurry and see what he says."

"Clothilde," he reproached, "didn't I expressly command you not to tell anybody what I told you about that affair in New York?"

"You didn't tell me anything that amounted to a row of pins," she retorted. "And I had to tell Cissy the night Billy was hurt. I couldn't get a word of sense out of you, and I felt responsible for the whole miserable thing. I sent for him to come down—and you yourself said that was the beginning of the misunderstanding. Have they made up? Why don't you read his letter, Bob, instead of sitting there staring at me?" Bob unfolded the letter leisurely. "I asked Cissy if she didn't think we ought to send for that girl to come down here. If Billy had died —"

"Well, he's made a deuced mess of it all," Bob cheerfully finished the first page, "if I can read between lines." He handed her that sheet and went on with the next.

"Doesn't say a word about *her*, does he?" Clothilde's good nature was restored.

Bob read aloud:

"This infernal fever hangs on. The arm is still in a sling, plaster of Paris arrangement that makes me feel half petrified. Now that I've got rid of a doctor and the fluffy little trained nurse, I'm better, I think. Burke Preston has been here with me, but he went back to the mine yesterday. It was imperative that one of us should be there. I expect to hit it out West myself as soon as I get rid of this temperature. And the sooner I get away from the East and people, I think the better it will be for me."

"By people," Clothilde observed sapiently, "he means *her*. That shows they haven't made up. I always did hate those cold-blooded Yankee women."

Just here the letter had no special interest to Clothilde. Billy was recounting some real estate deals he had on hand in California, and asking Bob to look into a matter he had spoken to him about before leaving — certain coal lands near Birmingham on which he had an option.

Bob began to read the concluding pages.

"Here, honey," said Bob, searching for the passage, "this is about you."

"I'm done with everything now but work. The only happy man anyway is the slave. Bring Clothilde and the kids out West this summer. They'll enjoy roughing it. Don't let a few acres of cotton stand between you and the vacation you need. Don't bother about the boll weevil and the rust. I've got enough money for us all to live on if we get to be centenarians. All I have will one of these days go to your children, old man. Maybe pretty soon, if I don't shake this fever. I enjoyed the glimpse of the old life on the plantation. You and Clothilde and the kids have what

kings might envy — happiness. Seeing you down there has spoiled it all up here for me. This glare isn't life, any more than gold is wealth. I'll be all right once I get away from New York. And any morning may find me turning my face to the land of the setting sun."

"He didn't mention Cissy, either," Clothilde observed thoughtfully. "Isn't it strange how people who should by all canons of romance adore each other usually hate each other? Well, I did all I could."

"Yes, you did all you could," Bob rejoined absently. "Good old Bill, up there alone!" There was a suspicion of moisture in his tones. "He's had the devil's own luck."

"Bob," Clothilde's small hand on each coat lapel whirled his face to hers with a fresh inspiration, "there's no use talking about it. We've got to do something for that boy! She turned him down, the girl in the blue gown; she's got no heart. I'd be glad he escaped if I didn't know he couldn't see it that way just now. But we can do something. I never saw *anybody* that couldn't be married off to *somebody* if the right person took hold of the matter."

He surveyed her tenderly. "I'll admit," he replied, "that the sentimental situation in these two letters is calculated to make any one interested in the parties lose sleep. Cissy engaged to the Governor of Georgia, and she has already lost an interest twenty years old in the world of men, including the man she's engaged to

— and Billy, the bottom blown out of everything with fever and broken bones in New York, talking about making his will in favor of our children.”

“He’s got no business up there,” said Clothilde, emphatically. “He belongs right here at home where we can wait on him. I never had any faith in New York doctors and trained nurses, anyway.” She rocked impatiently back and forth. “Let’s do it, Bob.”

“What?” asked Bob, with interest.

“We’ve got to get Billy settled! That’s what is the matter with him,” she lined her arguments off on her dimpled fingers. “He’s in the frame of mind now to appreciate a wife and a home. That Yankee girl couldn’t be such a paragon of beauty and cleverness that her image would always stay with him, especially after she’s treated him this way. Bob,” impressively, “hearts are often caught on the rebound.”

“I have heard so,” he encouraged. “Who’s the girl you’ve selected?”

“No particular one — yet. But the South is full of girls prettier and sweeter than she is. I know it! Let’s make him come home on some pretext or other, and give a house party, invite two or three dozen girls here for him three times a day. You’ll see how long he’ll be remembering that Yankee!”

He caught fire at her suggestion. “Great!” he exclaimed. “If we could do it!”

"Why couldn't we?" she demanded. "We could fit up the offices in the yard." From where she sat Clothilde's eye swept the broad lawn on each side of the drive where the "offices" that were a part of every Southern plantation home before the war stood. In the old days these were built for bachelor quarters. House parties were then a part of every season's festivities.

"The men could stay in them," Clothilde planned. "We'll have the right wing opened and aired, and the ballroom waxed and the third story put into commission once more. Don't you think we could have thirty or forty for a month? It will be something to remember after they are dead; we'll make them have such a good time!"

"We'll do it," he agreed, "on a before-the-war scale!" She whirled him around, encircling his neck with her soft arms. "Let's go over the house right now," she said, "and see just how many we can have. And write the invitations to-night!"

They stood in the lofty ballroom at the top of the house. The windows thrown open the first time in a generation let in floods of sunlight that threw bats and mice into great confusion. "I wonder," Clothilde mused, "why we waited ten years to have a house party. Why, that was what this house was built for, wasn't it?"

"We've been so happy ourselves," he suggested,

“maybe we didn’t know before we were needed to further the matrimonial game of others” —

She threw open another blind to let in more sunshine.

“Who knows, Bob?” she said. “May be we can persuade Cissy to marry the Governor of Georgia here — this time. Think what a setting for a wedding this room would be !”

“Oh, Lord,” Bob roared with a joy of his own joke, “when old Gabe Longshore marries Cissy, — I want to be there !”

CHAPTER XV

THE IDEAL AND THE REAL GIRL

"In this one pregnant subject of clothes, rightly understood, is included all that men have thought, dreamed, done, and been ; The whole External Universe and what it holds is but Clothing ; and the essence of all science is in the Philosophy of Clothes."

— CARLYLE, *Sartor Resartus*.

THERE are worse trips than a sea voyage from New York to New Orleans in midwinter. As the steamship *Areola* plowed her way through the late February fog, Billy Rutledge stood on the deck, idly watching the silhouetted sky-line of Manhattan. It hung, a city of gray mist, almost beautiful in its swaddling, smoke-colored veil. The Statue of Liberty, to his fancy, seemed a motherly old person, holding a candle for some one to get up the chickens. By these tokens he knew he was homeward bound. Lately the little unconsidered trifles about a home appealed to him as they had never done before.

He lounged in a deck chair while the sun broke from behind its cloud and shone brightly on the dancing water. Billy was already feeling better. Dr. McLean, his New York physician, had prescribed a sea trip, suggesting that he join the exodus to Bermuda. Instead

he had engaged passage to New Orleans. The fever had hung on and left him with a cough that made the physician shake his head.

"Better go South," he advised. "Don't take any chances with that cough, Rutledge. It's nothing now, but in your weakened state it is liable to give you trouble. Go to Bermuda for a month or two. Sometimes a cough that baffles medical skill yields up its ghost to a change of climate, and the patient loses it as suddenly as it came."

Grady was shipped West, and the New York office was left in charge of the confidential clerk until Burke Preston could come East, but he couldn't leave the mine until Billy came to take charge. Preston wired that his partner was not to try to come West until he was dismissed by the doctor, and the telegram was delivered to him on the steamer.

Billy planned to go to New Orleans. He was undecided what he would do afterwards. If he felt better, he might go on to Bayside; on the other hand he wasn't sure that he wouldn't go direct to the mine. The Colorado air might blow the cough away and the cobwebs out of his brain. He needed a change. Already the salt air had invigorated him; he despised himself in the rôle of an invalid, for prior to his accident he'd never been sick a day in his life. He sat by himself in a sunny place on deck and thought idle thoughts of the weeks before

Christmas at Bayside. They had been short weeks, all too short.

He was homesick these days for his own people, to get back to the home of his boyhood. He smiled reminiscently over what a homesick Southerner had told him once in New York at one of the Southern society dinners: that a Northerner slips into Southern ways and customs with the same determination to make himself at home with which a woman adapts her figure to the prevailing mode in gowns, but that no Southerner ever gets to be a reconciled citizen of Manhattan.

"Some of them pretend to be weaned," the other's words came back to him, "but go to their houses or to their dinner parties, and see how their every remark or story begins with: 'Don't you remember,' or 'In the South we —'" Billy smiled. He knew the type. He was recalling how Cissy told him that she hoped when she died that her spirit would go to New Orleans.

Cissy was a curiously interesting study to him. He regarded her solely in that light. He couldn't reconcile the mass of contradictions she represented. Clothilde's letters had been very frequent the last few weeks, for Clothilde, taking all the blame of his misadventures on her shoulders, — his coming to Bayside, his misunderstanding with the far-off sweetheart, the broken ankle and the collar bone, — felt that all of them were directly caused by her importunate telegrams calling him South.

She had tried to do what she could by writing him all the plantation news. The letters had been full of Cissy, who was still with the Gardners in Georgia. With elaborate indifference Billy had schooled himself to skip great paragraphs in Clothilde's letters, touching on the girl. He felt no interest in her, yet her memory persisted.

She had a trick of coming back. He saw Cissy with General Jackson's faithful, bleary eyes fixed adoringly on her, the old dog forever at her heels, and he smiled over Cissy's improvised deaf and dumb alphabet by means of which she talked to him. He saw Cissy's admiring small Brer Rabbit, his own five-year-old namesake, who trailed after because she was so much fun when she wanted to be funny, as the little boy had explained to him on one occasion when he tried to wheedle him away from the girl. Brer Rabbit had turned him down for Cissy! And Cissy took more trouble to hold the small boy than she ever did to excite his admiration. Billy made elaborate mental notes of the impossibility of her interesting him.

Then again he recalled Cissy upstairs somewhere, rocking the baby to sleep, and singing the foolish nursery rhymes he remembered from his own far-off babyhood. Yes, Cissy persisted! In spite of himself, his eyes grew tender as he recalled the day he had been an unseen spectator of a pretty scene in the garden at Bayside.

Little Bob was flicking the heads off of jonquils, up and down the path, while he waited for his father. His riding crop slew the yellow flowers as he advanced down the walk. Marjorie's shrill little voice had rung out, "Bob, if you don't quit hurtin' those flowers I'm going to tell Cissy." After that he was told by small Marjorie herself that Cissy had taught them beautiful fancies about flowers having hearts and souls. She had opened to them a world of delight in all growing things.

Then Cissy was tender of heart! And Cissy told Uncle Remus's stories so enchantingly that the whole nursery was under her dominion, even Mammy, the turbaned autocrat herself! Ah, but telling stories was only one of Cissy's accomplishments. Cissy could dance every plantation jig or cakewalk or "flutter" that the small pickaninnies in the quarter ^{it} could dance. There wasn't a steamboat call on the river she couldn't mimic, and her songs embraced every darkey melody, "reel" or hymn known to the plantation! Oh, when Cissy chose to be funny, it was well enough to be in her good graces. And to have Cissy get you to sleep — with a medley of it all — was a vaudeville entertainment that the Bayside nursery took at its true value. It was rather difficult to reconcile this side of Cissy with the other side, the spoiled belle and beauty, against which Bob took pains to warn him. Once he had come up the back way in the twilight and found Cissy seated before the great old fireplace in

the hall, feeding chips to the fire that smoldered under fresh hickory logs. And when he had offered to buy her thoughts, she had quietly replied, her chin on her pink palm, still close to the smoking wood :

“I was thinking of fire. It always seems to me somehow that a wood fire is full of — of — religion.” He held the picture surprisingly distinct. Even the tones of her voice came back from his memory like a softened phonograph record. “Don’t you think so?” He smiled to recall Cissy’s deferential little trick of saying “Don’t you think so.” And what was that song she had sung to him afterwards about the joy of life being hid in simple and lowly things?

His place at the ship’s table was next to that of Miss Nora Darrington. She told him with characteristic frankness that she had been on the stage in New York. Until a year before she had belonged to a certain stock company. Her family was all dead. He knew by reputation who her people were, from Cherokee, Louisiana.

Curiously enough, there were few Southerners on board. Billy liked his neighbor. She was so fresh, so keen, so unspoiled, so far removed from anything suggesting the stage, that from the first meal they were attracted to each other. Her wit illumined that end of the table. The captain of the boat was an old friend — of six years’ standing, she told him. It had been that many years since she left the South to seek her fortune in New

York. She spoke of coming back every year because it was a habit.

He fell into the habit of sitting with her as she sewed or read on deck. When he'd sit apart it would be to smoke, and even then he was within hearing distance of her drawl. Wherever her deck chair was placed she was immediately surrounded by her court.

By the time the ship was in the tropical waters off Palm Beach, the two had become good friends. There they passed close enough for the shore line, with its fringe of palms and parasols of coconuts, to be plainly seen from the deck. A shingly beach met the water. Over it hung Florida skies, blue as a turquoise, and the wind was a caress, a suspicion of salt giving zest to the bouquet of garden flowers.

Nora Darrington read a novel between surveys of the landscape when she saw any one approaching who seemed inclined to interrupt her pagan enjoyment of the hour. When Billy Rutledge, in the white clothes of the tropics, hove in sight, however, she made a place for him, and he placed his deck chair close to hers. They had grown to expect this afternoon visit with each other.

"Do you know," he dropped into his chair and took possession of her fat little workbasket, "it's a good thing we're nearly there? I'd be in love with you if this trip lasted another week."

"Don't do that," she begged; "I'm already engaged."

"Everybody in the world seems to be," he returned sadly, "except me!"

In looking through the basket he found a crystal ball and balanced it on a hand held on the deck rail.

"Seeress?" he inquired. "Diviner of the future?"

"On Sundays sometimes," she laughed idly, "and holidays. Other times it's a prosaic darning egg."

"Put up that infernal mending," Billy begged her, eying the crisscrossed flowers she embroidered. "Amuse me. Tell my fortune. Make me laugh."

"My grandmother was Scotch and clairvoyant," she warned him, "and born with a veil over her face. In New York once a famous clairvoyant told me I could see more than she could."

"You ever see anything?" he asked.

"Yes," she said quietly. An almost imperceptible change came over her face as she hesitated. "I saw things in this crystal ball once. That's why I am here now, on my way home to marry Charlie Gillespie." She offered the confidence, as she did everything else, quite naturally.

"Oh, I say," he began, "you must be joking."

"I'm not," she replied. "The very day I got my first chance to do something big in a play, I gave it up. It was the chance to star under——" She mentioned a manager of international reputation. "That day I accepted Charlie Gillespie. He has three enthusiasms in life — a country newspaper, his chickens, and me!"

She was very serious, though she smiled as gayly as usual.

"I'll admit," she said, "that I am superstitious. I never knew it before then. Maybe, after all, I saw nothing in this glass ball. Maybe it was only a mirage, a strange, fourth-story, back-bedroom mirage of life, but whatever it was frightened me. I thought I saw across the years the final price the small glory would cost me. It scared me and here I am." Vaguely he wondered what she had seen to send her so terrified to the one heart whose devotion she knew.

"I'll take a look for you," she laughed, her gayety all restored. "Hold it out, so."

It was the hour for the afternoon siesta. Everybody was below, asleep, except these two. Occasionally a sailor hurried by with a rope ladder, or a ship's officer saluted them in passing. A casual onlooker, seeing the good-looking young man and the girl in such earnest conversation, hearing their low laughter and noting the silences that indicated their perfect understanding even more than the laughter, would have concluded naturally enough that they were planning an Easter wedding.

Billy held the crystal ball in his hand, and Nora Darrington focused her eyes upon it, bending forward until her dark head was silhouetted against his white-coated breast. Finally she announced that she was seeing a girl. Maybe here and now the girl in the blue gown

would appear! An absurd hope of it stirred his heart.

"I do see her!" she cried, after a moment. "She's pretty —"

"Yes," he begged, "and what's she like? Her dress —"

"I can't see her now," she said, peering closer. "Yes. . . . There she is! She's dressed in a riding habit. There are a lot of children around her. I think she is the eldest sister — and there's a dog. Why, she's — she's crying —" The vision faded. She could see no more.

"It wasn't the right one," Billy told her. "They gave you the wrong number!"

"Then there is a right one!" gently. "There always is. I hope things haven't gone alee!"

Before he knew it, he was telling her the whole story, from the night he first saw the blue gown in the cleaner's window. If she was surprised or incredulous, she gave no indication. She cited innumerable instances where stranger things had happened than this.

It was a belief, she said, as old as Time itself. Didn't the Japanese believe that the good and bad qualities of a person communicated certain powers to their belongings. One of her best friends had a crystal rosary that had belonged to a Buddhist priest. Oh, she could tell him curious things about it! The Indians, also, she continued, fancied that the strength and prowess of a slain

warrior passed into whichever one of the living got possession of his clothes and weapons. Didn't he remember in the old Greek story how the belt of a slain hero dragged the murderer to his death? Why, if these things were credited by some, might he not believe that a girl's frock could be invested with the magnetism, the charm of its owner?

It is a curious relation of sympathies that leads us to babble to a casual stranger of things dearest to us, things that we lock against the very friend of our bosom. Billy Rutledge had more than the average fine man's reticence in speaking of what was close and sacred to him, but he turned his heart wrong side out, and was glad to do it and unashamed. It was very comforting to have a listener worthy of the confidence. His man's judgment in his estimation of a woman rarely failed him in these days. He had divined as soon as he saw this girl that she was different from most young women he had met. He believed in a real woman's intuitions; this one's vague, childish beliefs comforted him.

"And when you find her," Nora was saying, as she stitched away, "the girl in the blue dress, she must have all the 'fireside qualities,' too, and lots of sunlight in her disposition. You need it."

"There is a lot of sunshine about her," he said, "and starshine. When a man has lived away from people for a long time, close to the sky with the earth under his feet, he gets to seeing and feeling a lot of things for the

first time. Ever notice the light the stars shed? It's to the other celestial bodies just what dew is to rain. It's more ethereal, more intimate, somehow —"

"I know," Nora said softly.

And under her sympathy he went on. "She's jewel-ly," he said. "All new-mined topazes and sapphires, very much rose quartz and tourmaline-y —"

"Real sweethearts always are," she told him. "They are like the roses that the Sunday newspaper supplements say Pittsburgh millionaires send to chorus girls, — filled up and spilling over with jewels!"

Quick as a flash, she saw his hurt expression. "What you said isn't cheap like that," she hastened to explain. "I had to have my little joke. But I understood what you meant. Go on and tell me more of the potential effect of a pale blue dress on the Southern imagination, meeting it far from home."

"Do you think," seriously, "that it was far from home?" He had never considered that probability.

"Certainly," she triumphantly snipped at her thread. "Certainly. Pale blue these days is worn only by girls who get their clothes in New Orleans. Blondes are dying out," she continued gayly, "the old-time blonde who wore pale blue. The only ones who dare to wear it now are the far Southern girls without color, but with a lot of honey and gold in their skin and in their hair."

"Did you ever think," he asked boyishly, "what a

kiss visualized would be like? a kiss when the girl has a tea-rose face and hair like a thrush's wing?"

She knotted a skein of scarlet silk and began a new crisscrossing pattern.

"Of course," she laughed softly, "a kiss from a girl like that would be a palpitating, breathing image of a pale blue frock with daisy patterned lace."

"You must think me a noodle," he said. "I think these fancies are bughouse to the last degree."

"You're exactly right," she assured him, "to put a value on your dream, or vision, or whatever it was. For myself I haven't a doubt that the blue dress was simply an ideograph of her, wherever she is."

"That's just the melancholy point," he interrupted, "that she may not really exist. Not on this planet. Maybe she isn't born yet."

"A man's reason," she laughed at him, "when he's in love, truly is done up in swaddling clothes. Of course she's a human being. And of course she's living on this mundane sphere. Didn't you see her frock hanging in a Fourth Avenue cleaner's window? Angels or mermaids don't have to patronize the shops of this world to have their wardrobes freshened up. They've infinitely better dry-cleaning places no doubt in the regions where they dwell."

Of course — of course! Why had he never thought of that? It cheered him up amazingly.

The golden afternoon wore on. The ship's purser, a young college boy, came out and joined them with his banjo. This was his fifth trip, he told them, and he hoped his last one. The throat trouble that had threatened him a year ago had disappeared with his open life on deck, and he was going back next year to finish his course at Yale.

He twanged away at his banjo in friendly fashion, divining that he was not a third party. And as the shadows deepened and the sun dropped down nearer the white-capped blue sea, his fresh young voice rang out in *On the Road to Mandalay*, and Billy Rutledge's joined him, and Nora Darrington dropped into the chorus. The circling gulls dipped nearer, and the flying fishes leaped like silver javelins out of the water to bury themselves the next moment deep in the shining sea. They sang glees and odd snatches of college songs and darkey melodies.

"The Injian ocean sets and smiles,
So sof', so bright, so bloomin' blue" —

sang the college boy, twanging his banjo softly, and Billy Rutledge's deep baritone boomed in with the chorus :

"For to admire an' for to see,
For to be'old this world so wide;
It never done no good to me,
But I can't drop it if I tried."

That night Billy and Nora Darrington stood in the bow of the ship. From below came the throbbing of

the engines, steady as the beat of a pulse. The searchlight made a faint path of silver across the phosphorescent water. The yellow reflection from the ship's lights showed the ocean churned to a cream. Far out it stretched in blue immensity, reflecting here and there a liquid star. As the ship rose and fell, the salt spray fell on their faces like sharp little whips.

Billy Rutledge was telling Nora of the old plantation home at Bayside, and how his people had lived there for generations; about the quiet cemetery on the hill, where they had gone to their last resting place. He told her about his brother and Clothilde and their six merry children. How manly the small Bob was, with his gun and pony. He told her about the long-legged little girl twins and about fat little blue-eyed Marjorie; about his small namesake, Brer Rabbit, who liked the nickname because of his great admiration for the rabbit family's astuteness, then about the baby, crowing and laughing and kinging it over them all except Mammy, who dominated the nursery.

He told her about old Pomp and the other servants; how nothing had been changed on the plantation since he could remember; how the telephone was the only concession at Bayside that modern discoveries had a place in the home. He described the rickety carriage, and how Bob had refused to have the automobile he wanted to give them.

“But we don’t want it, Billy,” he mimicked Clothilde’s soft, slurring, Creole voice, “for why should we desire the automobile, smelling always of gasoline? We don’t desire it. Have we not already the cart, the carriage and the barouche?” He described the ancient barouche, all satin lined, yellowed now where once it was white; its deep, springy, cushioned recesses with places behind for the little negroes to ride, while the driver’s seat was in state on top.

“They’ve never realized,” he said, “that they are half a hundred years behind things at Bayside. My, but I wish you could see that vehicle! It’s so old, Miss Darrington, upon my word I don’t know what type of conveyance it belongs to. Pomp calls the carriage the ‘convenience,’ but this other ark on wheels remains the coach, the barouche, the company kerridge! It is grotesque, the veneration they feel for that archaic vehicle.”

“I know,” she said, her eyes very soft with tenderness for a people who love their traditions; soft with regret for the arrival of the inevitable, when the present encroaches on the past, and crumbles it even as Time yellows and crumbles the satin linings of “befo’ the war” coaches. “I grew up in a home like that.”

He told her about Cissy. Naturally she came in, since she was part of his brother’s household. How she was a vague relative of his brother’s wife, who lived with

them as one of their own children. He was telling her casually enough about Cissy until he came to General Jackson's allegiance to her. He stopped even here to justify his mention of the girl. He explained that he saw very little of her during his visit to the plantation. "But you should see General Jackson's devotion to her." He was enthusiastic again. "He's my old bird dog, fifteen years old. I named him for the hero of the battle of New Orleans, because that used to be and still is my favorite chapter from history. He was a great dog in his day, General Jackson. And he's a grand old ruin. He's deaf and he has to be beckoned to when meals are ready. And would you believe it, he's given the last devotion of his life to Cissy—er—Miss Dalrymple. 'Pon my word, it's as my brother says, the General is not unlike some old Southern gallant, a beau to his last breath.

"Bob says the General reminds him of Colonel Marson of New Orleans. The Colonel was at the Old White Springs in Virginia when Bob and Clothilde went there on their honeymoon ten years ago. He was then eighty-two years old and a widower for the fourth time. One night, going to the spring, they heard a voice they recognized as his, coming from a seat down Lover's Lane. The one sentence they caught was this:

"'When I get too old to love, my dear lady,' the Colonel was saying, 'I pray that that moment I may die.' He was courting a widow whom he later married.

“Well, General Jackson, battered veteran of the hunting field that he is, shows the same spirit. When he sees Cis — er — Miss Dalrymple, his youth is suddenly restored. He makes a brave show and gives a surprisingly good imitation of his old self.”

The ship churned on her way, The two tucked away in the semidarkness made their confidences as only two who speak the same language and whose traditions are the same, can talk to each other. There was no sentimental note in their friendship, which made it the stronger.

Nora Darrington laid a cool hand in his as he left her door. “Don’t make the mistake,” she begged, smiling up at him, her vivid, dark, little face alight, “of pursuing the Ideal so closely that you will overlook the Real Girl when you meet her.”

With which cryptic remark she said good night and disappeared into her cabin.

CHAPTER XVI

MARDI GRAS

“Days of absence, sad and dreary,
Clothed in sorrow’s dark array —
Days of absence, I am weary ;
She I love is far away.”

— JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU.

THERE are times when the most masculine of men knows himself to be three fourths feminine and entirely human and pathetically dependent for his happiness.

It was such an hour that Billy Rutledge faced when he went down the gangplank of the *Freola* at seven o’clock and became a unit in the seething thousands thronging the streets of New Orleans, waiting for the Proteus parade on Monday night before Mardi Gras was ushered in with “Fat Tuesday.”

Billy Rutledge only seemed to be alone. A man without a country is no more disfranchised than one who finds himself on such an occasion in a holiday crowd with no one to make merry with him. Holiday-ing is not engaging sport for one. Like happiness, it was born a twin, and without a companion it is impossible to give a convincing imitation of it.

New Orleáns on Carnival night — alone ! The time

and the place call for the Beloved One, and Mardi Gras loses its real significance if She be not there to laugh with the one who loves her. It's lonelier than watching the full moon alone, such a night in New Orleans. Every park seat and inclosed square, shadowed by whispering, tattered banana trees, shelters lovers telling the same old story of the divine adventure. The adventure that the fantastic Mardi Gras floats mirror in their papier-mâché molds of life. Make-believe Queens of Love and Beauty and Knights of Romance pass, waving greetings to the drab realities who are hypnotized for the moment and feel themselves to be a part of the wonderful unreality of it all.

And the music thrills and throbs and is a cocktaily brew that goes to the head of the most prosaic, and brings in its train memories to the old, and a devil-may-care joy to the young. It fuses the great, sprawling old city into a madcap, bent on having one more Mardi Gras before life resolves itself into an endless Ash Wednesday.

Every train and boat is disgorging passengers, two and two as they came out of the Ark, wending away to this hotel or that one in the happy intimacy of the hour. New Orleans, orange blossom and jessamine scented, steeped in romance that hides behind her old balconies, above the street on those wrought-iron, railed galleries, is at her best at Carnival time; whether the day fall early

in January or late in February or in March, she dons all her enchantments. At such a time a stranger without affiliations stands a wistful little boy on the outer side of a high, spiked fence, looking at the party within, hungry-eyed and wistful, and, the chances are, rebellious of soul.

Rutledge left his hotel and joined the crowd. He found himself borne toward Canal Street, which is the dividing line between uptown, or modern New Orleans, and downtown, or the Creole section. He wanted to lose himself in the crowd where it was thickest, and the narrow old streets in the French quarter were teeming with their picturesque and voluble citizens.

The laughing, turbulent city had swallowed up Nora Darrington and her fiancé. Billy had quietly slipped away when Charles Gillespie had joined her on the deck of the ship. He supposed they were off somewhere getting married.

From a balcony on Bourbon Street he surveyed the long, white-hooded negroes bearing aloft the flambeaux that light the royal procession. The scene was one that never lost its weird charm to him, but to-night he soon grew weary. The damp struck a rheumatic twinge through his ankle. The gay music hit his heart not unlike the way leaden bullets strike a calm river and sink down into it with a thud.

A woman can always extract a certain pleasure from

the most melancholy occasion, just as a period of great joy is never entirely lacking in a note of sadness for her. With a man it is different. Man may or may not have been created for the glory of God, according to the Presbyterian belief. But certain it is, woman was created for man. If he needs her to help him work, to show him how to pray, infinitely more does he need her when the time comes for him to play.

Billy was jesting when he told Nora Darrington that given another week at sea he'd be in love with her. But just the same, he felt a dull resentment toward the man who had robbed him of her cheerful companionship. To-night New Orleans might seem a place of good cheer and childlike fantasy if there were any one to share the adventure with him. Nora, his new friend and good little comrade, had gone off to be married. Ah — but if out of the gray fog and the music-haunted shadows there should steal to him now the girl in the blue gown!

He felt a light touch on his arm; crowded as he was on all sides, there was something personal, intimate, in it. He turned to look into a pair of merry black eyes peering at him through a domino. A gay little Pierrette, who danced like an imp, invited him to join her.

Something in the somber eyes of the man, — such a good-looking and personable young man, so broad of shoulder, and lean of face and long of limb, so strong and tall and big, — as he turned to her with an unmasculine

lack of curiosity, answered her invitation even before he shook his head, and told her that there was no companion for her holiday mood. Irresponsible as a butterfly, she murmured her "I'm sorry, mon cher," and flitted away after a more promising Pierrot.

The young man was truly, as she said, "of an ingrowing sadness."

There were telegrams to be sent to the mine and long-distance calls for Bob at Bayside. The line was down and he gave up trying to get into communication. While Billy was deliberating which train to take and where he'd go, the telephone rang. Mrs. Gillespie wished to speak with him. Mrs. Gillespie! He racked his memory. Who was Mrs. Gillespie? It was Nora. Her voice was as gay as the sunlight that flooded the room.

Where was she? In the same hotel, of course. Where had he disappeared to last night? She had thought once, she told him, of suggesting to the police that the river be dragged. He had vanished so suddenly. Ah, but she was glad and Charlie Gillespie would be glad to hear he hadn't disappeared entirely. He laughingly told her he was psychical about some things. "I can tell, for instance," he said, "when three's a crowd, if I happen to be on hand when there's a reunion."

She hadn't called him up to be chaffed about her own sudden disappearance, but to remind him that he had

promised to breakfast with them. "And hurry — I'm waiting!"

He found her five minutes later in the palm room, looking idly down the rotunda into the lobby beneath.

"Behold the deserted bride," she greeted him, indicating a group of men below gathered about the tall figure of her husband. "It's some sort of a league," she explained, "political and financial and industrial. They have come up from Panama or somewhere down that way to meet Charlie Gillespie here. He's taking them all with us to Cherokee to-morrow. It's to be an international house party, as I gather it, from the conversation over the 'phone. It involves rice fields, sugar cane, some cotton, and a line of boats to the Isthmus. For all I know those brutes may be breakfasting with us."

The fear was ungrounded, and the young husband soon hurried up to join them. He and Billy Rutledge liked each other from the first. Of the same caste, political affiliation, and both fundamentally interested in big undertakings, they were old friends before the French Market was reached.

Legue's is a long, smoke-mellowed room over a saloon. Its floors are sanded, and the dishes are of sturdy and strong crockery designed for the Gascon fisherman's ungentle hands. The linen, such as it is, is immaculate if coarse.

But the food served there has passed into one of the traditions of New Orleans. A few Bohemian souls

discovered the place and passed the sesame on to others, and soon it was public property and prosperous, with the prosperity that Carnival guests leave in their wake. But the Gascon fisherman eats there as noisily as ever, and though the spirit of the old Madame has long since gone to join Monsieur, her husband, in Paradise, the place still seems to be dominated by her. It is reminiscent, in its odorous, gusty breezes laden with chives and faintly suggestive of garlic and all the marvelous seasonings, of the old days when Madame herself tossed an omelette before the big, open fire amid the excitement and applause of her admiring guests.

Only one meal a day is served at Legue's, and this one is not attended by waiters hovering anxiously near, imploring you silently if you have finished to move on and let some one else have your place. It is a leisurely function, and since it must be arranged for beforehand, it assumes the distinction of a semiprivate entertainment. Only those who may be comfortably seated at the table are admitted, and once breakfast is started, the door is closed until to-morrow.

Their breakfast was a pleasant, leisurely meal, and over it the two men discussed the Panama Canal and what it would mean to the South. They found they had many interests in common. The Louisianian was interested in hearing of the mining ventures of the other man. His vivid enthusiasm awakened all the dormant

love of the West and its possibilities in Billy Rutledge. He told Charlie Gillespie about his early failures and his later success. He told him even more about the picturesque adventures and story-book rewards other pioneer souls had found in Colorado.

Charlie Gillespie could match these stories of Western faery riches with tales laid nearer home. He told of what Louisiana has to offer: her sulphur mines, her vast salt deposits, her ocher mines. "There's enough oil in this State," he said, "to make Rockefeller's holdings look like a tallow dip."

"And what about the sponge beds?" asked Nora. "That editorial you wrote about them, was it really true?"

"Every word," he returned; "the Bayou Barataria will yield up a king's ransom to some man one of these days, and it won't be La Fitte's pirate gold, either. With the Panama Canal open, the South has got the hook-worm if she doesn't wake up to what's her own. If we don't rise to our opportunities now, the world's capital ought to take the country away from us."

"If I'd had any idea," Nora told Billy Rutledge solemnly, as the men lighted their cigarettes, "that this man's heart and soul could be so subsidized by anything as it is by the visions of the wealth the South is going to get from the Panama Canal, from the mineral resources of Louisiana and from the Mississippi Valley with the

river under Federal control, I'd never have come home to marry him. I thought I was the grand passion of his life. Behold, too late I discover I'm only a romantic interest of yesterday, a heart balance carried forward. He has remained constant to me, not looking at any other woman, because he had bigger interests that demanded all his time and his thought."

"Ho-ney!" drawled the Louisianian, too low for Billy Rutledge to hear, through the cloud of blue smoke, "I'm going to get you a Merlin necklace of Truth for a wedding gift. You're a precious little liar!"

The Rex parade was over at last. The Queen's health had been drunk by her royal spouse in all his ermined splendor under the balcony of the Boston Club, the whole street cheering while the bands played the King's own air "If Ever I Cease to Love."

And the good-natured crowd, the Latin-hearted, sunshine-loving Creoles, hummed the parodied refrain:

"May cross-eyed cats
Go back on rats
If ever I cease to love."

The parade moved on, and the crowd trailed after it to the lilting air:

"May the Grand-Duke Alexis
Ride a blind mule to Texas
If ever I cease to love —"

Just as foolish young ducks on a river's bank leave their happy home to follow the first brightly lighted steamboat that passes after they are strong enough to swim, so the Carnival crowd trailed the gay Mardi Gras floats, to the limbo where Carnival trappings dissolve into thin air and disappear as mysteriously as they arrive on the streets of New Orleans.

"Charles Gillespie, what about that league of sunburned South Americans you promised to meet this afternoon at four o'clock?" Nora demanded of her husband, as the three of them dawdled around an antique shop on Royal Street.

"I forgot it, by Jove," he owned up boyishly, hailing a hansom. "First time in my life I ever forgot a business engagement. If this is your influence," while she made plans to meet him at the hotel, "I'll have to divorce you, honey!"

At the Pickwick Club half a dozen very elegant grandee-looking gentlemen cooled their heels and waited for Monsieur Gillespie. It was now twenty minutes past the hour appointed. To-morrow they are going as his guests up into the bayou country in the mutual hope that certain South American interests vested in them might find profitable investment. In this young planter, editor, politician, chicken-fancier and financier their hopes reposed for a line of independent boats out of New Orleans to the Isthmus.

The minutes ticked by, marked off by numerous gin fizzes and Sazerac cocktails. Coming from a leisurely Panama-hatted country, they forgot to consult their watches. Finally, full of apologies and very contrite, Charlie Gillespie hurried in, and divining what they had had to drink, ordered juleps for everybody.

International diplomacy, the young Louisianian was given to observing, is largely a knowledge of how to follow up drinks !

While Charles Gillespie sat in solemn conclave with South American Captains of Enterprise, Nora and Billy Rutledge went to the bird and animal stores on Chartres Street, where Billy bought two macaws, vivid as oriental jewels. One was for Nora as a souvenir of the day ; the other was for Clothilde. He bought love birds for the twins and a tiny marmoset for small Marjorie, and a Ching dog and three puppies for Little Bob. For his namesake, the small Brer Rabbit of the nursery, he started to buy an alligator, but his companion prevailed on him to get an Indian outfit instead. She went with him to purchase it, and he added to the other things an order for an enormous box of nougat and crystallized fruits and flowers. He found a distinct satisfaction in selecting the belated Christmas gifts, and the shops found nothing too costly, if it were proportionately attractive.

He had decided, he told Nora, to go on to Bayside,

and stay over Sunday, before he started West. But he was impatient to get back to Colorado. He hadn't realized, he said, just what it meant to him out there until he had come East. Even the South now meant less to him than the little Trust Luck mine. That was home. Those sunrises and sunsets and stars and moon had seen him face some pretty hard times, but also some pretty happy ones. He had been happier then than he realized.

"I know," she said very quietly, "the ecstasy that comes with a certain remoteness from men and things.

"For to possess in loneliness
The joy of all the earth."

"I believe you do understand," he said.

"I've extraordinary understanding," she assured him gayly, "for a woman!"

"But don't you get into your romantic little head," he begged, "that I am really bowled over by that psychical affair. I meant to tell you before this that the real explanation is that I was drunk and dreamed it all."

She refused to listen to any such nonsense. Why should a man be ashamed to own his interest in a matter, simply because it could not be proved by the ordinary sense of touch? For herself, she believed not only in the subconscious mind, but in subconscious vision, in a hearing finer than that which correlates sound in the ears.

"And I wouldn't be a woman," she admitted, "if I didn't believe that sooner or later you are going to find —"

"The angel who appeared to me in a vision?" he supplemented lightly.

"Sooner or later life shapes us," she said. "I think dreams are only a prescience of things that are on the way to us."

"And I suppose I'm not the first man who ever pursued a will-o'-the-wisp in one form or another, a dream in a blue frock."

"Everything that's worth while begins as a dream. You should be glad to have it even as such; it's a kind of faery interest in life," she told him. "I have a clairvoyant feeling that Fate has a finger in this pie."

Billy Rutledge was turning it all over in his mind as he dressed for the dinner he was giving his new friends later in the evening. It warmed his heart, the generous friendship, the lack of affectation in Nora's simple affection for him, and the naturalness with which her husband accepted him with the same friendship. It touched him that they had enlarged this, their day of days, to include him in their pleasures.

"One trait the Southern girl has," he mused, as he tied his cravat, "that I've never observed in other women. She has a capacity for affection, disinterested affection, a platonic friendship, that the others can't

even understand. It's the rock-bottom reason for her essential dearness."

Recalling Nora's affection, her adoption of him, he didn't wonder that Charlie Gillespie had held to his dream of winning her, even for six years after there seemed to be no reason for him to hope. When her sisterly affection could be so sweet and sympathetic, he knew the whole-hearted, deep love of the young woman must be as fine a thing as any man could hope to win in this world of uncertainties.

Then from Somewhere, out of the remote Everywhere, crept a question: Wasn't this same endearing, disinterested affection the secret of Cissy's charm?

Forbidden thought! But it returned and persisted. Cissy at twenty, fresh and unspoiled, generous and affectionate and lovely as a young poet's dream — Maybe, after all, Cissy wasn't the deliberate coquette, the flirt that Bob had warned him against, but a misunderstood child, lightly giving her affection as a rose distributes its fragrance on the garden close.

He ordered the thought angrily from his mind. His tramp thoughts had a way of unmasking sooner or later to show the same face lurking behind every domino. Cissy was a very Rosalind in her daring masquerades. What was Cissy to him? Nothing. It was a question that he asked himself often, and always the answer was prompt and emphatic: "Absolutely nothing!"

This morning he had engaged a table for to-night at Antony's and explained to this famous chef that he desired his best dinner. He added that it was in compliment to a bride and groom of yesterday.

"Ze love match, eh, M'sieur?" Antony's interest was fervent. "And young?"

Reassured on this point, the romantic old Frenchman went tiptoeing back to the regions of state and good smells to enlist the coöperation of Melisande, his fat little Madame. Carnival guests to-night could be served by Victor and Jules, by François and Émile and the others. Antony himself made a religious invocation, and, not influenced more by the gold piece — a souvenir to remind him at nine to-night — than by the charm of the young man himself, he began to plan the menu and to give orders, general orders. Then he went to look up Marie, his young granddaughter, the pride of the establishment. She was famous for her spun-sugar flowers, for her *pâtisserie*, her incomparable glacés!

"Ze weddin' basket of spun sugar, mon chérie! Ze orange flower candied an' lak ze frost. Ze Americaine yo'ng gentleman —" Antony produced the gold piece. Such tips were uncommon even from the generous patrons of his restaurant.

"Ze *cupid*, eh?" shrieked Madame, whose voice had a trick of soaring with her excitement. "Ze peenk

rose petals. Ze grand sugar basket. Your best, eh, bébé!"

"Me, I donno," pretty Marie put a finger to her forehead to consider, "me, I donno what color ribbon bow to put on dat basket."

"Blue, chérie," Madame made the decision instantly. "Dat blue, bébé. Blue ribbon wid dem peenk roses and two w'ite doves, dem turtle-doves, eh?"

Madame's fat hands described impossible curves as she indicated the dimensions of the spun-sugar basket. "An' one dove he seet here," she placed an imaginary decoration in mid-air, "an' the othair, he seet there."

"Voilà, ze nest here!" The young artist's dream had crystallized. "Ze nest filled an' overrunnin' wid dose peenk rose petals —"

It was Antony's boast and that of his little Madame and of the dimpled Marie that they spoke "the Americaine like Canal Street, yes." But they made ineffectual gasps not unlike fish taken from its native element if their conversation was protracted — say beyond five minutes — in this tongue of which they were past masters.

One might converse in the Americaine, — yes, but when it came to working out plans, only French could express them. They dropped back into it now.

The dinner justified the day spent in prayerful preparation for it. *Tomates frappées à la Julius César* followed the tiny absinthe appetizer the two men had

taken at the ancient absinthe house on their way down. There was a wonderful *Bisque d'Écrevisses à la Cardinal*. Pity those mortals who know not the possibilities in rawfish! *Crevettes Fallieres* and *Pompano en papillote*. Oh, incomparable Antony, the magician! The fruit of the sea he transmutes with a wave of his baton of a fork into flowers that blossom in his oven into strange deliciousness, with a taste so elusive as to be scarce more than a wonderful fragrance tickling the palate but leaving it uncloyed for what is yet to come. — *Omelette Espagnole*, the *poulets en cocotte*; and the *canards à la Tour d'Argent* — a noble dish worthy of the pride the establishment felt toward the achievement, a tower of gold truly appraised!

A little hush ran around the place. It was boded by a tense expectancy from the swinging door leading to the regions where art found its true expression. Antony himself, his face aglow, stepped over the threshold, bearing aloft the tray that held the sacred dessert, the apotheosis of art acquired in his fifty years apprenticeship in the kitchens of the great and the rich. Fifty years in which sugar and eggs, flour and cream and the other homely ingredients on which are based a chef's reputation had been but the chemicals from which he distilled and evolved his discoveries, inventions, no less remarkable in their way, than the radium so acclaimed when it was discovered by another Frenchman and his

wife. But who could eat radium? and failing that final test, did the discovery justify the years spent in seeking it? To work fifty years and then make a discovery. Voilà, but if one could not taste it, — of what value the circumstance!

Antony made his way down the long room. It was as if the High Priest from an Old Testament page walked in front of a procession, bearing the Ark high aloft and before him. His arms were uplifted to support the tray on which the quivering sweet rested. Behind him stepped softly his well-trained novitiates. They appreciated what he had achieved. They moved reverently, as befitted them in the presence of the master chef.

Bowing low, Antony presented the beehive-shaped, wonderfully decorated dessert to Nora, his genuflection indicating Billy Rutledge's position in the matter. But he, the master artist, took all the credit to himself for the triumph. His gesture was an unspoken request that the other guests might be permitted to behold his masterpiece.

"Certainly," agreed the host, "pass it around." And Antony beamed as he marched down the room and around with it, to a chorus of "oh's" and "ah's" and "I say, now, that's rippin', Antony!" "Incomparable, Antony!" He made his way back to his patrons, and bowing low, surrendered the sacred dish to Victor, his son-in-law, in honor, for him to serve.

It wasn't, on investigation, anything that any one of them had ever tasted before. How could it be, since it had never before been made! All sorts of strange tropical nuts were mingled in it with chestnuts glacéd. Blended in were fruits reminiscent of bananas, and vanilla ice cream. The next moment this flavor was lost in that of citrons and almonds, subtle with orange blossoms. The whole was infolded in a frozen mousse of cream, that was, in turn, incased in an outer meringue crowned to a faint biscuit color. It was even better to taste than it was beautiful to look at. Up came Antony, wiping his hands and bowing low.

It was of an invention, a new creation. Only to-day born, not yet christened with the name. He took great pride in his little joke. His deference was that of a fond parent who underrates his offspring to hear another praise it. As yet it was unnamed, but if Madame — she bowed low before Nora — would permit it, since it was created in her honor, he would be happy to call it after her. So *Meringue glacé à la Madame Gillespie* was added to Antony's list of desserts.

Nor was the wonderful spun-sugar basket less of a success. It was not unlike a miniature Mardi Gras boat, with its fat white doves, yoked up securely with the admired blue ribbon. And the spun-sugar basket gracefully spilled the "peenk" rose petals, and the charming bride declared it a work of art and as

delicious as it was artistic, and the pretty Marie was repaid for the long hours she had spent making it. Then came *café Brulôt Diabolique*, made as only Antony can make it, ablaze in all its Mephistophelian beauty in a silver bowl. And in with the cigarettes trailed a street urchin, a little wisp of a boy, with a basket of wet garden roses and the afternoon papers.

Charlie Gillespie threw him a dollar and turned his fragrant merchandise over to Nora. She stuck the red roses in her belt and opened a paper, while the two men smoked contentedly, talking about investments and politics.

"This is interesting," she suddenly announced from the society column. She read:

"Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gordon Rutledge of Bayside plantation announce the engagement of their cousin, Cecilia Dalrymple, to Mr. Gabriel Phillips Longshore, Governor of Georgia. . . . The wedding to take place at Easter.' That's your brother and sister-in-law, isn't it?" she asked. "Did you know it?"

A very cold hand suddenly clutched Billy Rutledge's heart. He couldn't understand why, but the blue ribbon sugar bow fantastically yoking the absurd white birds seemed to quiver in the sea of smoke and snap.

"If Clothilde wrote me," his voice was indifferent, "it had escaped my memory."

They went to the Rex ball at the Washington Artillery

all and danced with the rabble in shirt waist and skirt in approved evening dress. Rex's is the people's ball, and all are admitted to pay their respects to their king and his outgoing court.

Later the three went down to the old French Opera House, where the Comus ball was in full swing. To this Rex and his Queen and their attendants go at midnight. Comus is one of the most beautiful of the Mardi Gras balls, and to-night the house was especially brilliant. Billy Rutledge did not dance, for his ankle was still weak, but he sat contentedly enough watching Nora Gillespie and her husband; they were totally oblivious of the crowd about them and of the abominable floor.

Billy didn't regret the evening. He wasn't long in being discovered, and hauled out of his box and presented to the various queens and all their pretty maids. Most of them knew about him. They knew about Bayside and Bob and Clothilde, and they sent many messages to Cissy. And he reflected afterwards that he didn't feel any more bored than the majority of the men at the ball looked.

Once back at the hotel, he knew that all his vague discontent and restlessness had crystallized into something definite to-night, and he was glad of it. He couldn't have analyzed the feeling himself, but a change had come over him. If it wasn't exactly a peace attained, it was an apathy only a little less comfortable. People say dy-

ing is not an unpleasant experience. Those who know declare that the actual breaking of a heart is a deep realization of calm after a long period of restless pain. But it wasn't anything like that he had passed through. He had simply reached the goal of settled things. Out of his life should go to-night all thoughts of the dream-girl, and all thoughts of those who reminded him of what his memory of her was like.

He threw open his window. Even the hotel courtyard far below was ghostly in its desolation and stillness. The tired city slept. Penitential Ash Wednesday morning stars looked down. They seemed to his fancy not unlike the fluttering little tapers that Creole girls light on this day with a prayer to good St. Roch.

"After all," he mused, "no woman is so great a mystery as Life. From this time on she's my sweetheart, mistress, wife!" He lit a cigarette. Far off the old St. Louis cathedral clock struck three.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HEALING OF THE TREES

“The roof is high and arched and blue,
The floor is spread with pine;
On my four walls the sunlight falls
In golden flecks and fine:
And swift and fleet on noiseless feet,
The Four Winds bring me wine.”

— THEODOSIA GARRISON.

Cissy threw back her sun hat and stood for a moment poised on the cliff, looking about her. It was good to be alone. She stretched her arms and yawned like a cat sunning herself. Gathering up her pongee-colored skirts, she picked a way carefully through the dewy grass to a faintly discernible path down the hillside, leading to the deep wood below.

The hour savored of adventure. She was running away to be by herself, and running to these particular woods was forbidden. She had never been alone here before, for Bob's express orders were against it. For that very reason to-day of all days they allured her. She wanted to get away where no one could find her until she should be ready to return.

The past month had held no particular happiness for

her. Life, so far as that went, had resolved itself into a very dull affair. The world of men and women was not the place she had once found it, full of interests. Bayside, with its many guests, had never been so gay, and to her it had never seemed less charming.

This was the last day, however. To-morrow the guests would go their several ways. To-night's ball and tableaux ended the festivities. She was glad of that. She was glad that the program of to-day had been changed for her by a telegram from the Governor of Georgia. He had wired to say he couldn't get here until the afternoon train, instead of coming in the morning as he had expected. The message had come after the several wagonloads of picnickers had left for the woods in search of greenery to decorate with to-night. Cissy had stayed at home to drive to the station for her fiancé. As soon as she heard that he wasn't coming, she had slipped away to spend the morning in the woods.

The air was heavy with spring odors. It was as if Cissy had met two springs in one year. In southern Georgia, a month earlier, the woods and fields were as far progressed as she found spring in Mississippi to-day. But the Georgia spring had been simply an overflow of the Florida winter, — an advance guard that was mowed down overnight. This was the real spring and she had come in the season appointed for her to occupy the world. Cissy always felt, as a child, that the world was a great,



She had slipped away to spend the morning in the woods.

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templed place, a house with courts of forest trees and lawns of great forests, but a house still occupied by four different tenants. There was Spring and Summer, Autumn and Winter, each a separate family, each with servants in livery distinctive. Spring's house, she fancied, wore light green, Summer a darker green and somewhat different decoration; Autumn was all in brown and red and gold, while old Winter's livery was white or dun-colored.

There was a wheezing bark behind her, a desperate leap to take a ditch with the old high spirit, an ignominious fall, a rueful getting up and back on the trail, and when the wood was finally reached, a grand announcement that she was followed! Followed and attended too far from the house for her guard to be ordered back. A glad, deep bark, and General Jackson, crouched at her feet, his head down, was telling her what a perfectly beautiful time he felt they were going to have off here together.

"General Jackson!" Cissy cried in surprise, "what on earth do you mean? Dear old General, come on! Of course I want you. You're the only creature that lives in a house that I *would* let come with me to-day except Brer Rabbit."

General Jackson, secure in his position as bodyguard, dropped back to his usual three-legged limp, and wrapped himself in his rare dignity. He was very reserved, and very silent, as are all great masculine minds. It was ap-

parent he had come as a military escort and not in any rôle of butterfly companion.

The air was vibrant with all the sounds of spring; March waved her banners from budding tree and swaying vine. Over in the field yonder a negro was plowing, and the scent of the good brown earth mingled itself with the sunshine and the wind from the pine trees and the spring fluster of the birds. The path dropped precipitately down to a cotton patch. The brown stalks from last year's crop stood in even phalanx, some with many bolls of mildewed cotton in mute protest against the prosperity or lack of enterprise that would cultivate a crop all the year and in the end neglect to gather it. In the rows rainwater had formed bathing pools for the wild creatures that lived along this bottom, — rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and wildcats.

Cissy reached an old field of sage brush and made her way through its broomlike plumes. Now, climbing a high rail fence, she stood on the confines of the wood. She caught her breath at the beauty spread before her. Spring was holding here to-day a veritable flower show, an Easter bazaar. Against the tender green of the beech trees gleamed the snow of dogwood blossoms, now ready to fall in the big drift with other first spring flowers.

She smiled at her fancy that these slim young trees were wood brides with their wedding veils pinned carefully on, infolding them from head to heels. Yonder the

white haws, heavy with a later blossoming, stood, gay little attendants to this tree or that one, while redbud trees in their pink finery served as bridesmaids to others.

The wild, fresh wood scents made a bouquet that intoxicated Cissy to a forgetfulness of the tiresome world that she had left, and that she would go back to face the same people, playing her part. To-day she was a dryad, and her soul an empty cup held up to Heaven to be refilled with forest dew and the old forest faith. Her feet sank in the moist brown leaves. Each footfall, no matter how light, bruised some spring flower that gave up its essence to add to the distilled sweetness of the morning hour. She drew near a marsh that was overhung with the honeysuckles she loved. Suddenly she sank down in the bog. It was only wet grass and she didn't mind that; she didn't care if her shoes were ruined. She recklessly waded into mossy fen and quicksandy bogs after wild flags and violets.

Here, under a rotting log, gleamed the purple faces of violets larger than any she'd ever seen. The leaves gave forth an odor not less individual than the flowers themselves. She gathered a lapful of them and threw herself under a haw bush. General Jackson was almost imperative in his pleas that they go farther down the stream. The haw bush was low enough for Cissy to reach its thorns. These she used as pins, and with them fastened little bouquets of violets and leaves at random over her

dress. She pinned them on her sleeves and up and down her waist, as she had done when a child.

Even when the General's importunities had divorced her from this game, she didn't follow him far down the stream. Across it she found another bog luxuriant with honeysuckle. She climbed a swaying sapling, and in this way reached vines farther than she could have done otherwise. From her point of vantage she swayed to and fro, pulling great armfuls from its hiding place.

A redbird in a pine tree near by sang its love song; she trilled back notes that threw it into greater ecstasy, for she knew each wood bird's call, and she could deceive a bird about the trill of the very mate of its bosom. When she had at length gathered as much honeysuckle as she could reach, she carried it down the stream after the grandly stepping General, until they came to an open space, on the lower edge of which a little hill puffed itself up in pride about a great live oak. Just across, over the singing little stream, were a number of smaller pines and oaks that were but poles and trellis for the yellow jessamine that broke like some splendid odorous sunset on Cissy's vision. She stood still and took in long breaths of it, while the General capered around as best he might, wagging his tail.

"You can smell, dear General," Cissy patted him tenderly, "if you can't hear. Can't you?" And General Jackson seemed to nod his finely shaped head. This was

the spot toward which he was conducting her. The journey ended, he felt the need of rest, so he lay down in the sunshine and went to sleep.

Veritable swaying Jacob's ladders of embodied sunshine, the yellow jessamine blew back and forth with every wind. It seemed to connect the brown earth with that far-off roof of blue sky. It was a ladder, and the ascending angels were the wild bees that went up and down, up and down. Not one of the yellow chalices was left virgin by the velvet-coated cavaliers.

Cissy threw herself down on the short grass near General Jackson. The honeysuckles made a pillow for her head. She had broken pine branches to lay on top of it. And now she sank down luxuriously and became a part of the wood.

"Busy! Busy! Busy!" piped the catbird, as her spring bungalow took shape, outlined by brown twigs and held together by horsehair.

"Built and in it! Built and in it!" answered the bluebird, deeply absorbed in the two first green eggs of the community. This achievement filled her with pride. She liked to be the first in all things. She enjoyed telling her neighbors how foolish they were to build cumbersome family houses each year when they could with very much less trouble rent perfectly good holes in the trees which were easy to furnish, — furnish good enough for green eggs to rest in and blue babies to nest in. They flew away

so soon, anyway. She loved to tell how simple life in a rented apartment could be made. Here, in her small ménage, couldn't she offer proof? While they had been off collecting material for their houses, she had hers furnished and two eggs the start of anybody. "Built and in it! Built and in it!"

"S-hay! S-hay! S-ha-ay!" shrilled a jaybird. It was Friday, the day of the week when superstitious negroes believe all jay birds are engaged in carrying firewood for the devil.

"Did he do it? Did he do it?" fluted a little newcomer to the woods. Cissy rose cautiously on her elbow, trying to catch a glimpse of the sweet-noted bird. "Did he do it? Did he do it?" the bird fluted on. She couldn't locate him, but he seemed to swallow a long drink of sunshine, then to churn it up and down, up and down, in his tiny body, until the whole was but a meringue of joyous notes, liquid, sunshine netted, translated into a wild bird's song.

"Tweet! Tweet! Tweet!" Cissy whistled softly. A wild canary's bright eyes peered down at her from the oak tree. "Tweet!" she called, and he hopped nearer, his head on one side, deliberating. "Tweet!" Why, she didn't look dangerous! He said it distinctly enough for Cissy to hear.

"Tweet!" she called and waited. He came nearer. His little bride, with feminine curiosity, hopped cautiously

along after him from branch to branch. Together they discussed it — the little bird couple — what the pretty creature on the pine needles and honeysuckles could be.

“Tweet !” Cissy called again. “Tw-eee-et !”

“Why, she’s nothing but a great big wild canary like ourselves !” the little bird bride suddenly discovered, when Cissy’s hair tumbled from its amber pins and went rippling down her back, all tawny and brown-streaked where it wasn’t pure gold. “Aren’t her feathers the color of my breast ?”

The question settled the matter. Of course the new-comer was a wild canary, albeit a very much overgrown one. Her lines were those of a clean-cut thrush, this long-legged, slim creature under the tree ; but the wild canaries claimed her, for she was colored even as they were colored. Mrs. Wild Canary took a woman’s absurd pride in her discovery.

And because the truth of it was so obvious, her husband “tweeted” with her in answer to Cissy’s “tw-ee-t !” They even flew down and pecked around her, undisturbed by General Jackson, who, manlike, had a supreme contempt for pet birds and all feathered things that didn’t justify their existence by being an incentive to a sportsman or to a sportsman’s dog. When they flew too close to his nose, he brushed them away with the tolerance he showed to flies, and went back to his meditations, whatever they were.

The Wild Canaries pecked around Cissy and asked her all the foolish, inquisitive questions that neighbors have asked from time immemorial when they try to worm out of a newcomer where she came from and if she is married, and if so, what does her husband do for a living, and where is he now. All these questions and many more they chattered at Cissy, but she had grown as indifferent as General Jackson, though, unlike him, she seemed to be wide awake.

She didn't even reply to Mrs. Wild Canary's polite inquiry about where her nest was, and if she had found her husband any real assistance in its construction. Then there was the marketing. The big, long-legged stranger with the shining feathers and the pink, tapering claws showed a scandalous lack of interest in that. It seemed to Mrs. Wild Canary that now in the nest-building season, when everything that had life in it was contributing something new and young to the general glory of the world, that the stranger might be waked to an interest by her maternal advice where to find the best worms for the babies. Naturally any prospective mother would be excited over such a confidence. Not so at all. If the big Wild Canary down on the pine needles, with her nose buried in honeysuckle trumpets, had a nest and a husband, she was divorced in interest from both. If she had any babies, they were apparently of the kind left to outsiders to cherish.

"Come, my dear," said the exasperated little husband, "she's evidently not our kind of bird, after all. She must have come from some other branch of the family. Maybe she's a human being, she seems so inhumanly lacking in interest for the vital things of life."

Here, deep in the woods, Cissy had come to think things out. She wanted to get off somewhere to have a heart-to-heart talk with herself. And not with herself, after all. She rather pitied and disliked and avoided the creature whose outer semblance was her own, but whose heart and spirit were so far removed from the joy in life that once was hers. She was not so sad as she was tired, tired of herself and of all people. Once, coming into woods like these, she could have heard the yellow jessamine ring its faery bells; now the whole wood seemed more set to a tiresome, church-bell tolling. The beauty of the world does lie in the eye of the beholder, just as we always feel our own joys or sorrows mirrored in the passing show of things. A pain so vague it may not accurately be called pain is no less difficult to analyze than a misery acutely defined. Cissy knew that she was unhappy, but the cause of it all she refused to admit, even to herself. Maybe in her twenty years' ignorance of pain, she could not diagnose the dull ache that refused to be more or less than a dull ache.

Each sorrow has its physician and father confessor. There are those whom music comforts like a mother;

change of scene helps some to obliterate a memory, to drug an unhappiness. For others there are books that bless and understanding friends who can charm heartache to forgetfulness. Any of these to Cissy would have meant a confusion worse confounded. As a child she had had curious reserves, and her young womanhood had known no friend who fathomed the real needs of her spirit, or to whom she could give her confidences.

"The only thing that ever seems to know how to help me," Cissy had always said, trying to explain her dumbness in voicing her own feelings, "is a tree. Once I can get to a tree I know about things."

It was to trees she had taken her childish griefs. It was to trees she fled now, when the world got too much for her. And with the faith that makes no miracle impossible, no tree had ever failed to give her its blessing.

She was very young and childlike and naïve in the simple faith she brought to an ancient wood like this. Trees are so much older than humans, they must know more. They are so steeped in all the mysteries of the stars and the moon, in the sun's power, and intimate with the wind and in such close touch with secrets hid deep in the breast of the earth, naturally they are stronger and wiser than the fleeting race of human beings, who to-day are and to-morrow are mowed down and made away with, to make place for other little puppets who fancy themselves swaggering figures in the brave drama of life.

People, to Cissy's childish mind, had seemed to be paper dolls of a higher order, endowed with accomplishments that her gayly colored ladies and mustached gentlemen in the nursery lacked; but people were only people. One could never tell when they would die, as her young mother had died, — as her strong big father had died, — as all her relatives had died in the early days before she went to the sisters at the convent. But trees were always the same: things to come back to; the only things one never found unchanged or moved away.

As a child, Cissy had had this affinity. Near New Orleans, in the early years before yellow fever had cut down her parents with its harvest, she had spent happy days on a plantation, wintering in a big, court-yarded house in the city. There wasn't a tree on the plantation or in the courtyard that she didn't know by name and as a personal friend. She had prattled curious fancies to the turbaned black servants in the kitchen and in the quarters.

"Fonny ~~things~~ sho'," old Zelfhine was used to remark to Maria, ~~her~~ Cissy's nurse. "Me, I nuss Madame St. John's li'l Mignon. Such a chile she was, widout de feah. Wid de love, mon Dieu, for dem sneks. Any kind of snek from de coppah-bellied moccasin up ter de rattler. Gartar sneks! Humph, dey fishin' worms ter dat chile!"

Zelfhine was never tired of telling about the small Mignon and her snake-charming proclivities.

"Madame, she nevair know," she would continue. "M'sieu, perhaps, he would have assassinated me that I permit it. But dat bébé, dat li'l Mignon, dem sneks doan do her no harm. Dey love her jes' as she loved dem. She feed 'em bread an' milk. Me, I keep my mouf shut. I didn't tell her mamma an' her papa why she cried all one night when ole Big John frum de quarter come holdin' up a king-snek on he hoe, sayin' he killed it on de way frum de cotton-fiel'. Li'l Mignon she cry kase dat snek is one fer whom she feel de most affection."

"Me, I dunno," — she'd always reach the same conclusion, — "mebbe dem Voudou mek white chile lak it do niggah, eh?"

This question was beyond Maria. But she, too, had her confidence about her baby chile to reveal.

"Snek, huh!" she'd snort. "I'm glad it ain't dat li'l Miss Mignon I have to nuss. My li'l Miss Cissy she, too, have de love, but it is not for dem sneks. It is fur de trees she meks gre't outcry while I shove her 'long in de baby buggy. She allus got her hand held out to ketch at de li'l tree, to touch de big tree."

"'Mammy, see it is de li'l baby tree,' she'd cry, or 'Mammy, it is de mother tree. Look!' Always like dat. She growed up wid dem ideas. Dis li'l orange tree, she say, he'd git mad if she doan tek her bread and milk dere to eat it wid him. Dat banana tree yonder, she say, she lissens while dem trees whisper together. It is

dere she must mek de play house fer dem grass dolls, dem stick dolls she lak better dan any doll dey kin buy ner ouden de shop. So, too, she must tek her picture books under dem oleanders. Den dat gre't oak on de payou. She allus gwine ovah dere to set under it on de roots. She say she got to tell it t'ings. Me — I dunno! Babies queer; dey is sho'."

"But dem baby tastes," Zelfhine would shake her turbaned head until the big gold hoops in her ears glisened in the sunshine like brass mirrors, "dey keep 'em. Miss Mignon, she may not nevair tell her mamma nor ner papa 'bout dem sneks she pets and loves; Miss Cissy, perhaps she will spik less of dem trees as she grows mo' old, but 'way deep down fo'ks doan change much.

"Me, I obsairve babies like dat," she continued, — "the sunshine makes negroes garrulous, — "one baby she lak de sea and she must have de sea if dey raise her. De doctor he say of such a one she must have de sea. Once I wuss in Nuaw Leens in a fambly where de li'l Adele she gwine so for de sea, de whole fambly have to move to de summer place 'cross de lake at dat Pass Christian. She would not live, de doctor he say it himself an' I believe it, in de city. Adele mus' have de sea.

"So, too," she would babble on, "once I know one ébé — how you say it — wid de grande passion for de tars. Mon Dieu, yes, it was indeed so, for dem stars in Hebben! Man he need woman for his completion.

Das whut I heah 'em say. Mebbe so. Me, I dunno. But de yo'ng girl, she is different. She have strange sympathies, dose demoiselles !”

The old Creole negress was right. Baby tastes are indicated affinities. Oftentimes the years strengthen these and justify the early prophecies. Zelfphine's star had long since vanished from Maria's horizon. It's light no longer came within the radius of her life ; so, too, had the intervening years engulfed the petite Mignon and her love for “sneks,” so carefully kept a secret from her mamma and her papa. But Cissy kept inviolate that early love for trees. Her childhood's instinct to carry each heartache and doubt to her first friends remained. Clean forespent, clean forespent — she, too, knew what it was to come like the Master into the forest “for the healing of the trees.”

A Druid priestess might have made a sacrificial altar to the bearded oak under whose shadow Cissy now lay. The silent tree needed no words to make thé girl's heart intelligible, to give assurance that it was understood. No human child nestled close to its mother's breast ever felt a more personal comforter than Cissy did, as she poured out her inarticulate young soul to the ancient soul of the tree.

The peace of the woods stole over her spirit and soothed it. Yesterday was one with its past seven thousand years. To-day was newborn, blue sky wrapped, and

her own. Her eye, traveling upward, caught a curious formation of the branches at the very top of the tree. A small branch reaching out sidewise had shaped itself not unlike a human arm, grasping a parasol handle. The figure was carried out in the fantastic whorly growth of leaves at the end of this. The parasol swayed and caught a banner of the gray moss and a perverse breeze draped it about the edges of the parasol, giving it a strangely intimate and personal semblance. That gray-bearded ancient oak carrying a foolish sunshade! The fancy pleased Cissy, and she laughed aloud, a laugh that delighted her new relatives, the Wild Canaries. It was laughter full of tenderness and the budding joy of the flowers all around and about her.

Cissy recalled Father Dalmores at the convent, wise and old and as understanding as this tree. She could shut her eyes and see him pacing slowly down the lily-bordered walks. If Father Dalmores had ever deigned to stoop to such droll foolishness and had indeed carried a bit of painted satin and lace, molded into a young girl's parasol, he would have looked like this grim and ancient tree, holding aloft its foolish sunshade of green leaves, gray lace-draped. To Cissy, oaks were the wise old priests of the forest who give absolution to the irresponsible saplings at their feet, absolution and good advice. Father Dalmores had been like that. In his bigness and wisdom he had been very far removed from

the need of lace-trimmed cloths for the altar, behind which he preached, even while he conceded the Virgin's joy over a cheap vase presented to her by an adoring small Marie, who earned the money to purchase it for her patron saint.

Cissy wasn't a Catholic by faith, but her convent education had influenced her. A very curious world she found outside of the convent walls. A place far removed from the peace of the cloister, where all things had been done in order, by the ringing of bells.

Now at the convent the class in French literature could never make recitation with the uninteresting class in mental arithmetic. It would have been most foolish to combine the two. So it seemed to Cissy that out in the big world the first trouble was that the classes were all hopelessly mixed. Out of the confusion came only a greater restlessness, until it was a throbbing pain of noise and discontent. Her mind called for a well ordered scheme of days. She sighed for her little duties, and she wanted them arranged "by the sound of bells." Even if the bells weren't there, peace to her meant something to keep one busy. She had been busy every minute in the convent, and contented. Out in the world, the running hither and thither with never any one place to go back to finally was a great weariness.

Cissy's mind was in a groove it often followed these

days. She had no home, only the very dear invitation to spend all the time with Clothilde and Bob at Bayside. They were her nearest relatives. True, there were many friends to visit. Last winter and the spring before that she had spent months in New Orleans, in Mobile, with Polly Gardner, and this winter she had lingered on a month or two in Washington, after visiting friends in Virginia. Until lately she had reveled in the freedom, the irresponsibility of it all. It was all very well so long as she was happy and contented, but when days like this past month came, she longed for a home away from everybody, a home of her own to flee to and close the door behind her. She wanted sanctuary from the world that once had seemed so gay and fine a place.

Cissy saw but one door that promised to lead into the retreat her spirit craved. And sometimes, on days like to-day, the old doubt came back, that maybe what she saw wasn't a door, after all. Maybe the Governor of Georgia wasn't the rescuing party she judged him to be. But he was nearer what she wanted than any of the others. He embodied a home, the protection, the understanding she had not found in any of the other men who had wanted to marry her. There were many, as Bob had said, but Bob did not know from her the state of their hearts, nor that they had been offered to her.

Cissy had a cool little head. She was not flattered by her popularity, and she was truthful to her own heart

about her conquests. Some of them had wanted to marry her because they wanted to marry her—for no reason more obvious; others had wanted to marry her because the first had found her so desirable. And so the train grew. There are always men who are ready to marry the girl every other man wants to marry. Popularity is as a snowball that grows as it advances. One beau can leaven a whole measure of a girl's popularity and send her down to the next generation an accredited belle. With Cissy, who made her *début* under auspicious chaperonage, the trick was already turned. She made two conquests before she left the convent; two irreproachably born young gentlemen sent her impassioned notes by day pupils, and true to their word they were waiting for her, mortal enemies, when she left and made her bow to the big world at a Carnival ball, the Mardi Gras following her graduation in June. It had grown from that—her popularity.

For herself she had not felt the need of love, what it might mean or what it might not. She knew from Clothilde that a happy marriage such as she had made meant a certain peace. She had gathered from the conversation of most of her friends that marriage was justified, and brought its own reward in that it placed a girl in a definite position, as the mistress of her own home. A woman must make her own home, they told her, or live on unattached, a derelict in that wistful harbor of old

maids, fearful of putting out to sea without a captain. "Non! Non!" she could hear the old Creole nurses of the quarter cry, "it is of a loneliness, that ole maid life! One must mek de home against de comin' of ole age, yes!"

True enough, Cissy had observed. A woman must make her own life, or she must cling like a barnacle to some one else's home.

General Jackson sat up, wagged his tail and moved closer. Satisfied that she hadn't called him, he drowsed back to sleep. A yellow butterfly came trailing the blue violets along the bank of the stream, then another and another.

"I am to-day like that butterfly," said Cissy to herself; "the world is a sunny flower garden now. But the winter comes and the flowers go. And still I hope and wait, foolishly arguing. It is the time that comes to all. Virginie Sinclair marries old Dr. Hardwood; Celeste Gautier marries her brother-in-law with three children and the bald head. Marie Lancaster has wedded with George Pitout, her father's friend. They are all happy, at peace. They tell me they would not be back with the young girls. So —"

Thus she justified her impetuous decision to marry the Governor of Georgia. His peace and his sweetness of nature, his tender, fatherly understanding, his power to keep the rest of the world away from her when she

did not want the world to touch her, was his first appeal to her. His very age made its plea for him. He diffused in himself the protection of a well-ordered home, for he was in his methodical way as systematic as the convent. His life was ordered to noiseless bells, but it made for a harmony that left in its wake all the peace of the cloister, for whose stillness Cissy longed.

Sometimes she had a pretty hard fight laying low a dream that intervened between her and the mansion house, the Governor's home, toward which her face was set, scarcely forty days off now. But Cissy was a doughty little fighter and she usually won. It was a battle that involved her pride, and it was this pride that resented most bitterly the encroachments of the dream.

True there were unguarded moments when the forbidden man would steal across the ramparts of her dreams, when, in place of the Governor's rather faded but still fine eyes behind his glasses, a pair of brown ones always with the expression that she tried to forget — the look of love deeper than any she had yet sensed in her affianced lover's — beseechingly and tenderly sought her own.

This alien face pleaded that there must be some misunderstanding. But she knew better and she knew her danger. It was at such a moment that she always picked up the tail to her spirit skirts and fled, terrified, to thoughts of her fiancé. He was the rock that was higher than she. In his shadow alone lay her security.

But now there was no need of her to think of anybody. The sun beamed down directly overhead, and her woodcraft told her it was twelve o'clock. She had no intention of returning just yet. The picnickers would get home about two, and there was a chance they wouldn't miss her before then. General Jackson snapped at a gnat, found a cooler spot and resumed his nap.

The magnetism of the earth, the mingled music of the birds, and the noonday cicadas shrilling from the high trees, soothed her like a lullaby. There were no wireless connections to bring her messages from the world she had left. She lay back, her head pillowed against the pine needles and the yellow jessamine and honeysuckle. It was a rare bouquet. The blue sky arched overhead with its drifting argosies of white clouds.

She was just getting ready to step aboard one herself, to join an angel sailing party, when the ring on her third finger, the great diamond solitaire, cut into her flesh. Half awake, she slipped the hand out from under her head, and lying on her elbow, she dug a little grave for it under the withering yellow jessamine; the blossoms were arranged decently over the mound. General Jackson watched her, one eye awake. Then, ungyved in spirit, she hastened back to the waiting white cloud schooner, and stepping aboard, sailed away.

CHAPTER XVIII

A NYMPH THERE WAS IN ARCADIE

“Does not all the blood within me
Leap to meet thee, leap to meet thee,
As the Spring to meet the sunshine?”

— *Hiawatha*.

BILLY RUTLEDGE reached Bayside on the train that Cissy had intended to meet. He was not expected and there was no one to meet him. Jed Givens suggested that he might telephone, but the wires were down. Billy looked around to see if he couldn't find some one going his way. “Bub” slouched out of the station to say he was going home in about half an hour, and if the other man wanted a lift, he could take him to the plantation.

Bub's mule was better than nothing, and as he jogged along the muddy road Bub, as host, tried to divert his companion with the neighborhood news. Billy thought the house party was over. Bub informed him otherwise; he even told him who was there. Bub's mind was slow and direct.

“You didn't git Miss Cissy, after all,” he observed with easy familiarity. “Did you? She's gittin' ready

ter marry the Governor of Georgy, they say. He's been here twict this month."

Billy replied that he believed he had heard that Miss Dalrymple was engaged to Mr. Longshore. "He wuz comin' this mawnin'," Bub continued, "but he sunt a telergrum 'bout four hours ago that he'd missed the train and he couldn't git here tel afternoon."

"Is that so?" Billy encouraged dully.

"They're goin' to have the farewell shing-ding to-night," Bub proceeded. "Like a the-ay-ter, they tell me. Then they're goin' ter dance afterwards. I reckon," glancing at Billy, "that you won't be dancin' ef you're still lame."

No, he hardly thought that he would dance. Just here Billy remembered the path that led through the woods, across the fields, to the gate back of the stables. He would take that. It was about three miles, but he felt a sudden uncontrollable desire to walk. The spring woods tempted him, and Bub was a companion from whom he wished to divorce himself at the first opportunity.

"If you'll let me out here, Bub," he said, "I think I'll take the short cut through the woods."

"Ain't no use in your walkin'," Bub stoutly insisted, for he liked his companion and didn't want to lose him. "I gotter go by the house anyway, ter see Mr. Bob. Jes' as soon, an' a great deal ruther, kerry y'all the way. Aw,

come long. I'll whup th' mu-el up." But even the promise to whip up the lazy little red mule hitched to the bumping cart couldn't persuade Billy to continue the ride.

Bub watched him disappear into the woods. Loose-lipped and dull of eye, he slouched forward, too indolent to start his mule again. "Git up," he said finally, flapping the lines across the scrubby little beast's back. "Git up. I'll be dad-gummed," he continued, as the road was resumed, "ef I'd hoof it with er team like this to git me whar I wuz goin'. I'll tell Mr. Bob," he said, with a sudden gleam of intelligence, "an' he can send er nigger on er hoss to meet him. He ain't gwine to git to th' house befo' th' party begins on that ankle. Like as not hit's broke. Git up."

Cissy sat up and rubbed her eyes. The General's bark had awakened her. The old dog was running joyfully to meet something, somebody, beyond the honeysuckle tangle around the bog. She couldn't tell how long she had been asleep, but from the feeling of her head it must have been hours.

The honeysuckles had begun to wither; the violets pinned over her dress hung dejected purple faces. What had wakened her? Had she been asleep? Oh, — and for hours! It must be fully two o'clock by the shadows the trees cast.

The General had barked, but even before then she had

dreamed she heard footsteps. She sprang to her feet to look around, recalling Bob's orders that she must never come alone to these woods. But she wasn't afraid, only sleepy and bewildered with the sudden waking.

Could she believe her eyes? Was she still dreaming? She rubbed them again. There, crossing the fallen tree that made a bridge over the gay little green brook, the General proudly acting as escort, came Billy Rutledge. For a moment he looked as if he, too, saw a ghost. Then the next moment such ridiculous joy, such absurd tenderness illumined his face that her own heart's excitement seemed justified.

"Why," he said, and his tone resolved the whole world of beloved things in the observation. "Why, is — it — you — Cissy — Miss Dalrymple —"

"No! Whatever makes you think so?" she laughed back, extending her hands to meet his. "Sure, this is my sister." She mimicked a little Irish girl's impertinence to the parish priest; "I'm at home, tendin' to th' goat."

The hills echoed to his laughter, and even General Jackson relaxed his fixed countenance into a smile. The wood that before had been mildly springlike and pleasantly scented with budding trees and the good March sunshine was transformed suddenly into a place as full of gayety and laughter and unreality as a theater. On former occasions he and Cissy had found no dearth of

interests in common, but to-day he had stumbled upon her in the rôle of a dryad, and she did not doff her mask. The years rolled back, and Billy Rutledge might have been a very freshman in his keen zest of the moment's joy.

“‘A nymph there was in Arcadie,’” he sang, lying flat on his back, “‘who owned a crystal spring’! Where’s yours?”

“Sure and there’s runnin’ water,” again Cissy was the flouting Irish girl, “right be-side me dure. Whut ’ud I be wantin’ wid er spring?”

“There’s one, all right,” he indicated, “up that way. The negroes used to think it had medicinal qualities. Up beyond that tulip tree, around the bend. There’s a hill that should be waiting there, too, if I remember. This was one of the haunts of my boyhood’s Jesse James days. It was a robber’s retreat even then. We played at being brigands here. But what,” suddenly, “are you doing in these woods alone? What did they mean by letting you come by yourself?”

“I have to get off by myself in the woods every now and then,” she said, “to get back my poise.” She laughed with her old light-heartedness.

Billy had never seen this Cissy he had come upon un-awares ten minutes before. His eyes were studying her still. She was hunting for her yellow hairpins in the pine needles. Her tawny hair, only half pinned up here and there, caught and held the sunshine. Her eyes were

bluer than the lapis-lazuli beads about her white neck. Her face, stained pink by the heat, showed a diamond dust of freckles. The particular branch of pine needles against which her face had been pillowed had left its imprint on her cheek. Her skin was not unlike a chiffon veil lined with pink and patterned.

He told her so and asked her if she were trying to give Hamlet down here all alone, with herself as Ophelia. "I see," he said, "you substituted pine needles for straws."

She put up her hands to find the pine needles in her hair. He reached over, and disentangling them, laid them in her lap. Then she twisted the great braids and coils of her hair, trying to make it stay in place; her bronze lashes were drooping, for the sun was in her eyes and she wasn't yet wide awake. As she sat looking for the innumerable yellow hairpins in the pine needles, she seemed as far removed from the world of realities as his girl in the blue gown had seemed months before. The brown shoes she tried to hide were caked with mud. Her skirts were dew-drabbled and grass-stained.

"Or maybe it's a charade you were doing," he suggested. "What's that old line of Timrod's about the blue-eyed dryad stepping forth from the beech tree's heart and saying, 'Behold me, I am May!'"

"I'm not May." She shook her head, her mouth full of hairpins, her arms over her head, twisting into smoother order the sunburned curls. "I'm March," she said, "and

the only relatives I have in the world," she pointed to a big-eared, soft-eyed little bunny, too young to know the danger of coming within smelling distance of the big dog, "are the Rabbit family —"

He remembered to ask her then about his small namesake. It was the child's boast that he had no relatives "except jes' wild yarebits." Oh, li'l Brer Rabbit was all right, Cissy told him. She confessed that she tried to steal him for to-day, but that the other children surrounded him and interfered with her plans. "I'll tell him," she said, "about these woods. I've found here the very thing he's been looking for — a laughing place."

"What's — a laughing place?" he asked her.

"Upon my word!" Cissy sat up very straight and regarded him with astonishment. "And you don't know that every rabbit who sustains the reputation of his race, who keeps up the traditions of his family, has a laughing place? Just as human beings have a country place and a town house. A laughing place is a place — to laugh! Our Brer Rabbit has been looking around, and I've been trying to help him locate one. The General and I have found it."

"Here?" he asked, looking around the grassy nook, carpeted with white partridge berries, violet fringed at the water's edge.

"This," Cissy told him seriously, "is an ideal laughing place. It's a wonder it hasn't been snapped up before."

"Maybe," he suggested, as the white fluff of the baby rabbit was turned toward them and the little brown ball of fur bounded up the hill and away, "maybe that little rabbit child overheard you and hurried off to tell his father."

"But the General and I," she assured him, "have already secured an option on it."

"It's a pretty nice idea," he told her, "to have a laughing place."

Certainly, she agreed. Didn't people have a library in which to read; a dining room in which to eat; a sleeping room in which to sleep, *why* shouldn't common sense suggest that they also have a nice place fitted up where they might come and laugh?

Excellent idea, and one that was justified in her selection. He had never found a place where it was easier to laugh. And as for Cissy, whose mood of depression had given place to one of wild merriment, that young woman had forgotten all the things she would probably some day recall with self-reproach, and now, her pink hands about her knees, her head thrown back, she was giving impersonations of the different members of the Rabbit family that sent Billy off into a gale of laughing applause, while the General barked his command for an encore.

"How'd you ever stray into —"

"Polite society?" she supplemented, fanning her flushed cheeks with a Mayflower leaf.

"I was going to put it — into the world of men and women," he said. "This is your real setting: the green grass underfoot, the blue sky overhead. You're nymph, you know, or a dryad. Where is your crystal spring?" he begged.

She pointed to the hurrying little green brook. "'It' the stream called By-and-By,'" she quoted very soberly. "'I live on its banks, kind sir.'"

He asked her if by any chance her stream might be the one by the side of which the youth in the fable lingered until he had grown to be hoary as Father Time. When his mother came to see why he stayed so long of his errand, was still seated on the banks. "'I waited the stream to run by, mother, and it has not finished passing!'"

Cissy's slim hand hid for a moment the deep shadows of her blue eyes; then she looked up through the tangle of her long lashes and laughed, and said why, of course she knew the boy who waited for the stream to run by, waited until he was a gray-bearded man.

"Everybody knows him," she declared. "Isn't he Everyman's son, Everyman's self? His excuse," impatiently, "is always the same."

He wondered what she meant, but it was so obvious that she meant nothing, sitting there bareheaded in the sunshine, making a pine-needle necklace for General Jackson, that he made no attempt to analyze her remark,

and he obediently rose to adjust the General's decoration when she had completed it.

Cissy had diverted the conversation away from personalities. She gathered pine cones, and loading them fantastically with spring merchandise of bluet daisies and partridge berry blossoms, she moved nearer the beam and launched them gayly. When the flotilla of bobbing spring blossoms was caught in the current and carried along out of sight, she announced that he must join her,—that the next boat down would be an enormous one, carrying a picnicking crowd. She set him to work to weave the raft out of the pliable haw branches. She herself would be busy, she explained, collecting the passengers.

And a curious lot of passengers she showed him. There were fantastic grass ladies, made by pulling grass up by the roots, washing these and transforming them by some stretch of the imagination into hair. Once this was curled and coiffured, and the head was located, the rest of the lady was not so difficult to embody. Cissy spent the greatest amount of thought on what sort of leaves would make up best for traveling dresses, now and then calling to the ship's carpenter to get his advice. He advised something waterproof, maybe with a premonition of the fate that awaited the picnickers. There were grass ladies and ladies made from curious sticks, and with these went absurd little men with pig hickory-nut faces.

These were her real achievement in passengers. Cissy declared that she had invented a new type of human, and very human looking were the pig hickory nuts, scrubbed until the winter's stain and moss were removed from them. Then, with Billy's fountain pen, she marked eyes and a mouth to balance the absurdly human-looking noses. It was a game, and the two played it as such, with a light-hearted lack of thought for yesterday or to-morrow. To-day was all that mattered.

"Now you get on that side," Cissy called, "and I'll stay over here." They were getting ready to launch the excursion boat. Ah, it was off! A brave craft, with its bobbing, droll little passengers. Cissy ran down the stream to keep pace with its progress. Billy, with more nautical foresight, lingered to break a long pole. There was a sudden cry from Cissy. She was trying to reach the raft. It had been caught in an eddy and swirled and seemed in imminent danger of going down.

"Hurry," she called, "I can't reach it!" The boat righted itself and sailed on down the stream. But there were other eddies for it to cross, and in one of these it soon came to grief. Cissy ran down to where old stepping stones connected the banks, and on one of these she tried to reach the flower craft and its freight. Her foot slipped and she came near going headlong into a deeper pool. Billy reached the bank just in time to catch her. The commotion set the raft adrift, but he held her hand across

the water flowing so swiftly underneath, trying to persuade her to cross over to his side. No, she drew back. He still held her hand, warning her against the crumbling bank on her side. No, she pulled away from him.

"Promise me," he was beginning, trying to persuade her to wait until he could come nearer to assist her.

"I won't promise you anything — here," cried Cissy. Vows made over running water are lover's vows.

To-day was a gate opened back into their childhood. "Save them," she cried, for the raft went careering toward another eddy, and the next moment it was sucked down, the passengers going this way and that. "Save them! We are responsible! We put them on that boat!"

It was very foolish, the rescue. Even General Jackson refused to take part in anything so childlike and undignified. Five passengers were rescued by Cissy, up to her shoe tops in the water, and Billy made a dip-net out of his hat and scooped up half a dozen more. Cissy was for rigging up a Red Cross tent to nurse them back to life, but her companion pointed to her feet, and ordered her to turn the passengers to him. They were consigned to the far side of the stream. Then he turned to Cissy.

"Take those shoes off immediately," he commanded.

She didn't. Instead she stood up in the sunshine, and called upon General Jackson to testify how many a time last winter she had waded in icy water up to her waist, hunting ducks on the Chesapeake. The fact that

General Jackson wasn't with her on those occasions made him no less valuable a witness. Once, she told Billy, she had walked all night in the rain without an umbrella, when she was one of a fishing party on the river, when the water rose and overflowed their camp. What was this! A speck or two of blue mud! Who cared? She didn't, certainly.

"Stick your feet out, then," he commanded. "Shine, Miss!"

He scraped the mud from her little brown boots with elaborate imitations of a negro bootblack. Every now and then he'd call her "Cunnel." He polished with his handkerchief and an improvised moss brush from the north side of a sweetgum tree.

"How's that, Cunnel?" he held up one boot in the palm of his hand. "It's a regular Natural Bridge of Virginia!" he observed, surveying the slim, high, arched instep. "None of your people been slaves for five hundred years, have they? Water could flow under this and rise to high tide, and not touch the bottom of your foot."

"I'll have an Aristophanes' shine," she announced severely. "Wasn't there such a man?"

"When you're getting a free gratis shine," he grinned back, bareheaded and boyish, "you can't specify you'll have it in silence. And another thing, — a bootblack and a barber are two different individuals. Don't confuse the professions, Miss."

And then they went fishing, all of a sudden. Cissy's fishhook was improvised from a bent pin, with a fish-line made of a thread she raveled from his handkerchief. She flirted with a minnow that shone like a silver-backed sardine in the water. Billy Rutledge, with a string, allured bull frogs, a red cigarette box cunningly simulating flannel as bait. While he was waiting for a bite, he lay sidewise on the bank watching the girl farther down, as she dangled the bent hook just out of the sardine's reach. "Why don't you let him get it?" he called.

"Because I don't want him to hurt himself," she said. Then he roared his derision and said she'd better write a supplement on fishing and call it the Compassionate Angler.

Cissy splashed the water idly with her willow pole. "People are like streams of water. Haven't you known, for instance, somebody who was exactly like this little stream of green water —"

He might have told her, and he was tempted to do so, that he knew one person not so unlike it, pretty close at hand, with a heart reflecting the sky above and a childlike joy in the simple things along its banks. A little, clear-hearted stream of cool water, full of refreshment, with a magical charm to renew the youth of those whose currents it touched.

"And I know others," she was saying, "who are like

pools of brackish water. The kind of pools, the kind of people, who take up everything that's poured into them and give nothing back."

"I know," he said, "and a scum rises on their minds just as it forms on stagnant water."

Then there were others, she continued, — hadn't he seen them? — who were like cold, leaping waters from some mountain height. Electrical, and like torpedoes wherever they touched, galvanizing dead things to life and interest. Yes, he knew.

There were so many streams, she babbled on, just as there were so many kinds of people.

Silly little streams, she classed some, that don't know their own minds, that have no plans. These are the streams that end up suddenly in some pasture land, or maybe in the middle of the road. "Because, like some people, they are too lazy," she laughed, "to decide whether or not they'll go on, so they just disappear." Then there were the shallow creeks, reflecting peach blossoms and all the pretty things along their banks in the springtime, but not to be depended on when the cows and pasture creatures really needed water. She knew people like that. Pretty enough, until one really needed them. Then, like the mirroring creeks, they had dried up and gone.

Then there were the noisy, quarrelsome, bickering streams, that pretended not to be interested in anybody.

or anything but their own business. And there were the streams that didn't let their left banks know the good their right banks did. "They do all sorts of charming things, these little streams," said Cissy. "They are always busy and to be depended upon to do more than one could ever get them to promise to do."

Of course he knew that type of person. They were the cool springs in the always parched land that most people have to pass through, one time or another.

"There are so many," she said, as she flapped her pole at the minnow, who was determined to swallow the bent pin. "The deep, placid lakes are like thoughtful philosophers, and the strong rivers are like business men engaged in affairs of national importance. All end in the mystery of the ocean. It is like life," she mused, throwing her fishing tackle aside. "Everything is exactly alike, — birds and streams and animals and the seasons and people. And the sky is a turquoise stirrup cup, in which all things and every creature will be finally mixed to make a grand toast to be spilled back into the earth."

"What a little pagan you are," he exclaimed. "I thought you were going to sum it up that death is the ocean into which all the little streams of life flow."

"I'm not sure about the stirrup cup," she said thoughtfully, "but the little stream idea holds. There are days," she continued, "when I know that I'm a little,

placid stream in my relation to the rest of the world. I flow along my appointed way, clear and serene."

He told her he had started to tell her that she reminded him of such a stream.

"Now if any one were to come along," she said, "and take that long stick and stir this stream around, it would be muddied and upset, and dead leaves would float on the top and —"

"And the Nymph would flee from it?"

"Something would flee until it could settle down and find its peace," she said. "Isn't that the way it is with human beings? Haven't you had a clear, peaceful water feeling that you were a brook, deep and serene and cool, and suddenly some one came along with a long pole of words and stirred you up until your spirit was muddied and clouded with dead leaves and all sorts of trash, risen to the top of your mind?"

Cissy was serious, but she had no intention of letting her companion lose his gay mood. Hadn't he said he knew where there used to be a crystal spring — up yonder?

They soon discovered the spring; it was set, as he remembered it, in the dimple of a hill farther up and was one of the reservoirs of the brook. Around it grew a waving field of green mint.

"I'll mix you a julep," she laughed, gathering her hands full of the fragrant herb. Billy made a cup out of wild cucumber leaves.

"And the spirit of the sunshine to-day," she said, "will take the place of other spirits." She busied herself crushing the mint and in a careful arrangement of the long stalks looking out over the brim.

"It must be a loving cup, then," he said; "we'll drink it together to —"

"Brer Rabbit's laughing place," she supplemented, and they drank the toast. Then, when he began to recite Pinckney's toast and lifted the cup "to one made up," she stopped him in the middle of his speech, the julep in mid-air. Her infectious laughter echoed and tinkled down with the spring water as it sang its way on to the green stream.

Cissy, standing in the sunshine, her tawny hair in disarray, the drooping flowers still pinned over her dress, her cheeks damp and glowing; with fresh freckles on her lovely nose; her hands mud-stained and dyed with yellow jessamine blossoms, her dress crumpled and spattered with brook water, was very far removed from "one made up."

"Here's to —"

General Jackson's deep bark resounded down the stream. Some one was coming. Bob's "Hello!" rang through the woods. The next moment he rode in sight, leading a horse.

"Well, I'll be d——!" he remarked to himself, seeing the two before him. "Bub told me you were limping

along through these woods, Bill, old man; how are you? But what under the shining canopy are you doing here, Cissy? Gabe Longshore came on the two o'clock train, and the entire house is out beating the country for miles around for you. The Governor of Georgia is about to wire for the State troops to come out to help him locate his fiancée."

The first cloud of the day sailed across the sun just then. Billy Rutledge gave a glad greeting to his brother; Cissy, conscious that some one had taken a long pole and stirred up her peaceful blue stream of a spirit until it was a muddy and disturbed brook, answered finally, in a dull little voice, that she had simply strolled off to be by herself. The General had followed her!

And Billy added that, walking home through the woods, he had come across them and that together they had had a day in Arcady. Bob had already forgotten Cissy. He was interested in having news of Billy himself.

Cissy went back to get her hat. General Jackson seemed in the plot to further her sudden dissatisfaction with the day that a little earlier had seemed so sweet. He was scratching up the dirt where the yellow jessamine was heaped for her pillow.

"Ready to start back, Cissy?" Bob called. "You ride my horse and Bill can take the one I brought for him. I need the exercise, and I want to go by the field over there to see that nigger plowing."

Cissy had joined General Jackson in despoiling the little grave under the yellow jessamine. She had forgotten her ring until the General, with his keenness of vision, saw that she needed to be reminded. Together now they dug until they found it.

"Things must be going better with you, old man," Bob was saying. "You look like yourself to-day."

Billy assured him that everything was right with the world so far as he knew.

Ordinarily Bob would not have thought of touching on so delicate a subject. But things had been thrown in such a muddle during these past few weeks, and poor Clothilde had been so upset and unhappy over the part she felt she had played in the matter, that he made an effort and said: "I'm mighty glad, old man, to see you cheered up. I hope things have gone all right with you in every way." Billy said they had.

Bob hesitated again. Then: "Clothilde has worried herself sick over you and — er — your sweetheart. She felt that the misunderstanding was all brought around by those foolish telegrams of hers. She wanted to write to the young lady herself, but she had no name or address. I kept her from writing the full confessional to you. The whole truth in a nutshell is that I told her when you first came that you were — engaged to some girl in the North."

"Don't worry about that, old man," Billy begged. "I shan't mention it to Clothilde, unless she brings the

matter up. You tell her it's all right. Things are fixed so far as I am concerned."

Bob's voice, reassured, grew louder. Cissy could not help hearing his hearty: "Well, I'm sorry you didn't bring her down this time. Fine season for a honeymoon. Everybody's getting engaged — eh, Cissy?"

The last words alone were intended for Cissy.

"Oh, everybody," she said gayly; "it's in the air."

"What's that you're flashing this way?" Bob asked, as the facets of the diamond threw the sun in his eyes. "Come, let's have a good look at the engagement ring."

She held out her hand as she mounted a stump to vault into the saddle. "I love diamonds," she said, which was an untruth.

Again she and Billy Rutledge rode together. The merry companionship was ended, however. The spell had been broken, neither realizing just how it happened. It was a bubble of an adventure that had flown off into splintered rainbow tints before their very eyes.

She told him of the people who were staying at Bayside and what they'd been doing to amuse themselves; and how to-night there were to be the tableaux and the ball. She was more animated than she had been, but there was no sparkle in her gayety. No, it wasn't exactly a headache, she said, as she passed her hand wearily over her eyes, but she was tired. She hoped the others weren't at the house.

"I feel like the remains of a Sunday-school picnic," she said, as they rode through the great gate back of the stables.

"I tired you," he reproached himself; "I found you an immortal-eyed dryad. Be warned," he begged. "Undine wasn't happier for letting a stupid mortal stop to play with her. And any dryad —"

"Who leaves her tree," she smiled and her blue eyes grew very dark and deep, "deserves the freckles she gets and a headache, besides. I had a feeling," — she suddenly regained her old gay abandon of the morning as they rode toward the gallery, behind the vines of which were the sounds of many voices, "I had a feeling I ought not to take that julep!"

"It was a risk, I grant you," he whispered, in the great onrush of welcome from the steps. "Bob came just in time. Another one, and —"

"Cissy!" cried Clothilde. Around the corner of the house limped General Jackson. He seemed to be trying to explain to the Governor of Georgia, who stood bare-headed on the steps to receive his bedrabbled little fiancée, that he had been chaperoning this picnic party. He almost gave the impression that it was he who had suggested it was time for the other two to return.

CHAPTER XIX

BRER RABBIT

"You sail and you seek for the Fortunate Isles,
The old Greek isles of the yellow-bird's song,
Then steer straight on through the watery miles,
Straight on, straight on, and you can't go wrong.

"Lo, Duty and Love and a true man's Trust ;
Your forehead to God, though your feet in the dust ;
Lo, Duty and Love and a sweet babe's smiles,
And these, O friend, are the Fortunate Isles."

—JOAQUIN MILLER.

CLOTHILDE, in billowy negligee, tugged to get on a satin slipper.

"I tell you, Bob," she said, stamping her foot and removing the shoe horn, "I'm glad they are all going to-morrow."

Bob Rutledge turned from the cheval glass with a muttered "damn" at his own reflection. He tied and retied a cravat and tied it again and threw it aside for a fresh one.

"Why?" he asked perfunctorily.

"Because," — Clothilde stamped her silk-stockinged heel deeper into the slipper, — "look at your coat, and at me, and see. Why, we're ten years behind everything."

"It's my wedding coat," he defended. "What's the matter with it, anyway, and with you, Clothilde?"

"Nothing," cheerfully, "except that that coat typifies you and me and this generation with which we've filled the house. You and I and your wedding coat and these slippers are ten years behind the times. And I'm glad of it."

"What's gone wrong?" he inquired. He left the glass, his tie still unconquered, and came to where she sat before the fire. "What is it, honey?"

"Oh, I don't know," she returned, "everything that I hoped would be right has turned out all wrong. I don't mean," she hastened to explain, "that it's anything about the house or the party to-night. But I've come to see," thoughtfully, "that one can't arrange love affairs and make matches. I'm discouraged and disheartened."

Leaning over, he kissed her while she tied his cravat.

"Petunia Oldfield has broken off with Jim DeLancy," she began. "She's dead in love with Gabe Longshore, who has eyes only for Cissy; and Cissy in turn has renewed half a dozen of her old flirtations. Marie LeCœur has been putting letters under the jardinière in the bow window at the head of the steps for Dudley Millington, and to-day she has been crying her eyes out because she heard he is also exchanging letters with Betty Millsaps. Their post office is under the honeysuckle by the bird's nest in the far summerhouse."

"What the devil," he began, "do they want to write letters to each other for, when they are here in the same house?"

Clothilde regarded the toe of her slipper. In the firelight it looked rather more pink than a time-ripened yellow.

"Maybe we've forgotten," she said with elaborate sarcasm, "what it is to be in love, and young and care-free. Elise Gwynne and Rutherford Sykes have patched up the quarrel that was upsetting their apple cart yesterday, but it's all going to be on again. I know she 'phoned to Sam Glover to meet her in Memphis tomorrow."

"And I thought," her husband returned, "that they were all having a bully time, with not a cloud in the sky."

She stretched her dimpled arms over her head and yawned sleepily. "I tell you what, Bob," she said, "I'm glad I'm out of it all, — society, with its disturbances. That I've got a dozen babies to occupy my mind —"

"Six," he corrected; "you're seeing double."

"I've almost come to believe what I've known for a long time." Her eyes caressed her tall husband standing with one foot on the low fender by the mantel as she drawled her confidences out. "The only peace in life comes when the preacher —"

"Pronounces the world without end bargain, the promise —"

"Yes," she nodded. "I know it's the solution to it all. What amusement," she asked, "do you think any woman could find in running about after she is married? Ouch! These slippers do hurt my feet!"

"No wonder," he remarked; "it's ten years since you tried that last."

"Miss Clothilde," Mammy's enormous bulk filled the door leading from the nursery, followed by children in various stages of undress, "I caint do nothin' wid dese chilluns. De baby's cryin' fer you ter rock him ter sleep. De all uv 'em, Marse Bob," she turned to the father, "got de ole Nick in 'em ternight. I caint even do nothin' wid Brer Rabbit."

This was an admission of revolt. Small William, nicknamed "Brer Rabbit," was usually in high connivance with Mammy. She, best of the household, excepting Cissy (who could not always be prevailed upon to do so), could tell the tales of birds and beasts he loved to hear. Brer Rabbit was ordinarily Mammy's first aide, but to-night, as she said, even he was beyond her control.

Not that she blamed him for it! Brer Rabbit had a grievance against the whole world. His mother, by way of punishing him for a rank disobedience earlier in the day, had pronounced a punishment upon him that his soul rebelled at. He wasn't in a mood to be gentle

with his little sisters and brothers; he wasn't even feeling kindly toward his mother and his father. And as for wearing a nightgown, a gown that girls wear — he had no intention of going to bed! He'd sit up all night first.

"Muvver's li'l lambs," Clothilde crooned, as, taking the baby from Mammy, she went back into the nursery, followed by small Marjorie and the little boy who was so mad at the whole world. Mammy lingered to have a word with the father.

"Marse Bob," she begged, "it's er scan-lous shame, it sho' is, fer Miss Clothilde ter mek Brer Rabbit wear er gown. Das de reason ur all dis here 'sturbance. He won't sleep in no gown. He wants his pie-jarmas."

Her appeal to the head of the house was in vain. William had been disobedient, he reminded her.

Mammy knew when they call Brer Rabbit "William" in that tone of voice there wasn't much use to plead for him.

"Bob," Clothilde called from the nursery, "don't go down until I see you! And when you do go, I wish you'd inquire from Pomp if Marie LeCœur has finished with Pink. If she has, tell her to come straight here to help me dress."

Pink was Clothilde's colored maid, and without her she was helpless indeed. Pink could have put on even these slippers so they wouldn't have pinched. Clothilde had determined three weeks ago that the next time she

invited guests she would inform herself beforehand which ones would come supplied with maids. Marie LeCœur's love affairs were tiresome enough, but she could sit through the recital of them; but to be robbed of her right hand! Pink's being otherwise engaged to-night was only another thorn in the aggregation of sharp-pointed trifles that had upset Clothilde's usual sunny nature.

"I shan't go down until you see me," Bob called from the next room; "I don't know that I shall even have the courage to appear then. Ten years since I've had on this dress suit."

There was a swinging step down the hall, — a step that Brer Rabbit knew.

"Er — Bill, old man!" Bob called out; "come here! Don't I look like a nigger preacher or a head waiter?" He surveyed his reflection in the glass.

"'Frog went a courtin'
And he did ride.'"

Clothilde's velvet voice floated in.

"'Sword and pistol
By his side — ump-humph!'"

"Now, Mammy, warm his little pillow. Get the flannel to wrap him little foots up in! And get little buddy's gown!"

The small boy, very grave, sat on the window seat,

watching the flames reflected in the panes. Marjorie rocked a doll and sang to it. The twins at the far end of the room had their heads together over a wonderful big book full of pictures of parades and genii and black slaves.

Evelyn read aloud in a subdued voice something about the Wicket Jenny being caught again and sealed in a vase that was thrown to the bottom of the sea.

Mammy, her hands on her hips, surveyed the assembled ones. She might be listening to "Sister" reading over yonder. She might be beaming approval on Miss Clothilde because she had conquered where she had failed. Mammy laughed inwardly at this. She knew and Brer Rabbit knew that Mammy didn't ever need Mother to put the baby to sleep. It was only a ruse to get Miss Clothilde into the nursery. Once there, pinioned down with the baby at her breast, it was easier to talk with her. And to-night Mammy wanted a sentence remitted. Brer Rabbit's eyes were bright and shining. All was peace and quiet, and Clothilde rocked and sang on :

"Where, oh, where shall the wedding be?
Way down yonder in a hollow tree —"

"Bill," Mammy heard from the next room, "come look at me in my wedding suit. It was the latest thing in evening clothes ten years ago. Clothilde says —"

Here Clothildé called out for them to come into the nursery. She wanted to compare the kind of clothes Billy had on with the coat that was Bob's wedding coat. And then she saw that the difference was so trifling that no one would observe it.

"One thing about evening dress for men," Clothilde observed; "it reveals the gentleman, whatever vintage it may be." She really liked Bob's better, though Billy said he had two other dress suits, and that Bob was welcome to them. Bob, since Clothilde approved, said it wasn't worth the trouble to change, now that his cravat was tied to suit him.

Clothilde rocked back and forth, dressed in her gay negligee, and, laughing, held out her feet for Billy to see her wedding slippers. The sleepy baby gurgled and reached up to get a handful of the lace that went cascading down the front of her dressing gown. Mammy bustled about the room, picking up a tiny dress here, a shoe there, or gently leading a wheeled horse to its stable for the night. The twins were so deep in their book, they did not notice the visitor at first, but when they did, they came like little whirlwinds to throw themselves on Billy. Clothilde told them that they must go instantly to bed. Instantly! Yes, upstairs in the room next to Cissy's.

Then when they grumbled about its being so far off and so dark, Clothilde reminded them that they were

very inhospitable little girls to grumble because they had to give their room to such a nice old gentleman as Cousin Lawrence. "Cousin Lawrence" was a withered and white-haired old man. He brought the kind of candy they did not like, hoarhound drops, and he was not a nursery favorite. Now Billy —

They were on him again! When would the man come? and what colors was he? — and did he know Ching dog's name, and was there one puppy littler than the others? Marjorie, who was asleep on the breast, the rag doll she had started out to rock to sleep, woke up and wanted to be told again about her marmoset. Would he get here on the train to-morrow and in time for breakfast?

"And what's the matter with old Brer Rabbit?" Billy called gayly, when he had satisfied the curiosity of the others. The small namesake sat very pensive. He had been interested in the Indian outfit earlier in the day; he was no longer eager. There were always many questions he had saved up to ask this Billy whom he adored, but now none of them seemed worth while. He was in disgrace and the sentence seemed to be one that was not going to be revoked. "Brer Rabbit, why aren't you in bed?"

Mammy, with her license, broke in with a deep-voiced laugh. — (It was she who had given the little boy his nickname. "He doan look lak no 'Willum,'" she had said

when he was born. As he grew older she found the name that suited him. She had it from Uncle Remus himself in his immortal description of Brer Rabbit:

"Ef dey's anybody whut kin set up 'twel de las' day de mawnin' and not git red-eyed and heavy-headed, de Brer Rabbit.")

"Brer Rabbit," she hastened now to explain, "ain't my. Dat's him. I ain't nuver seed dat chile when he de need ur a nap. He sot up ternight," wistful after see ef maybe there warn't some'en he could do fer his Mama or fer his Papa."

Neither his "Mama" nor his "Papa" gave indication that they heard Mammy currying favor for her favorite.

"You'll have to go on to bed, dear." Clothilde laid the baby down carefully. "See, the girls have gone," as the twins, after kissing "around twice" left for the night. "Get little buddy's gown, Mammy."

Brer Rabbit suddenly announced, "I won't!" then modified it to "I don't wanter!"

"He wants his pie-jar-mars," explained Mammy. "I jes' doan think, Miss Clothilde, dat I kin lay my hands on er gown fer him."

"It's a nightgown for him," Clothilde was firm. "Take your medicine like a man, little buddy. Mamma told you positively not to touch any of those chess cakes. You're being punished for your own good."

"Dey warn't but twenty-five uv 'em," Mammy grumbled to herself. "Whut's er chess cake ennyway? Grown fo'ks ought ter be 'shamed rammin' an' crammin' deyse'fs full ur food. Chess cakes ain't no mo'en chicken-feed sweetened and crusted —"

Her remarks went unnoticed. Brer Rabbit sat very erect and batted his eyes fast, not with sleep, either. Over yonder his father talked casual nothings with Billy, his big uncle, and his mother kept on tucking the baby in.

"Miss Clothilde," Mammy could stand it no longer, "please doan mek Brer Rabbit sleep in no gal's gown! He ain't evah gwine eat no mo' chess cakes. Is yer, honey?"

Brer Rabbit's eyes were swimming; it might have been smoke from the fire, only it wasn't anything less than mortification at the insult about to be put upon him. A girl's nightgown, after his own beloved pajamas! Any soldier could understand his feeling. He was having his stripes and bars removed.

"Dey warn't but twenty-five dem li'l fool chess cakes nohow," Mammy was angry now, and addressed the men. "'Ria stid ur puttin' 'em whar dey b'longed, she hatter set 'em up on de pantry she'f, by de wide-open window. While dey wuz hot an' smellin' ter Hebben, smellin' ur sugar and spice and evah t'ing nice whut chilluns loves, 'long come Brer Rabbit. He

smells 'em. He's white, he ain't no niggah ter be axin' 'Ria ef he kin have one dem chess cakes, please, ma'am ! Brer Rabbit, lak er man, he stepped in de pantry. Whut's twenty-five chess cakes? Whut's one chess cake? Not ernuff ter fill Brer Rabbit's hollow tooth ef he had one. Twenty-five chess cakes ! Dey warn't mo'en a snack fer him. Das er fine t'ing ter tek him outen he men's clo'es fer !" Mammy's voice was wrathful. "Puttin' him back in gal's clo'es kase he showed hisse'l sich er man.

"Now er li'l gal," she continued, "she'd er stopped by and picked off a crust er two, maybe tuck ha'f er chess cake an' gone on. Den 'Ria nuver would er missed 'em. But along comes steppin' Brer Rabbit. He got er man's appetite. He retch up lak er li'l king and tuk whut he wanted, and while he wuz dere, he didn't see no need ur stoppin' tell he'd got he fill ; and 'twarn't he fault ennyway ef 'Ria didn't make but de twenty-five uv em ! Das how come you gotter wear er gown ternight, li'l buddy !" And she gathered the small boy up in her arms.

Mammy's voice was perilously teary. "A court martial, eh?" asked Billy. Then suddenly he turned to Clothilde ; "Come now, Mrs. Mother," he wheedled, drawing the small boy to him, "this is a party night. Let him off. It will spoil all my fun if I know my namesake is in disgrace and in irons."

He said much more. But there wasn't any need to listen to it. Mammy knew and Brer Rabbit knew that a powerful ally had arrived, and one with much influence with the court. If Billy, the wonderful, long-legged, rich-as-cream Billy, chose to plead indulgence for him, the case was already won. Mammy just here declared to her mistress that Pink was in her room, and Clothilde hurried back to proceed with her toilette for the evening.

Bob, his hands deep in his pockets, surveyed the baby sleeping in the cradle on the other side of the room. He had never grown quite used to the wonder of them yet — after nine years spilling over with pink babies !

Mammy triumphantly watched Marse Bob's exit from the room. Brer Rabbit was also relieved to be left alone with Mammy and his hero. Mammy finished putting sleepy-headed Marjorie to bed and tucked her in. Then she got the little boy's night clothes and hung them over a small chair-back, to warm by the fire.

Brer Rabbit was saying he wished he was going to sit up to-night until after they ate. He was politely inquiring if Billy wouldn't ask his mother if he couldn't stay up that long. Mammy discouraged this suggestion.

"You better let her 'lone," she advised. "'Fust t'ing you know she'll clap you inter dat gown yit !"

Well, would Billy please bring him something to eat?

"Brer Rabbit, you gwine bust sho'," Mammy re-

marked, "one dese heah days. Hit's er wonder dem chess cakes didn't git yer yistiddy!"

"Old man," Billy said to his clinging namesake, "at a shindy like this one, eating isn't in order until late in the evening."

"But I doan never go to sleep," the little boy boasted. "I'm Brer Rabbit, you know, ain't I, Mammy?" appealing to the high tribunal who held his "pie-jar-mars." "I can set up 'twel everybody else is red-eyed in the morning. Can't I, Mammy?"

"If you're awake," suggested Billy, "I might join you with supplies sometime during the evening."

"Ice cream?"

"Ice cream," promised the other.

"And cake?" asked Brer Rabbit. "And bird-egg candy?"

"All of that," assured Billy.

"Now, Brer Rabbit," Mammy reached for him, "come 'long ter baid."

He hung back, declaring he didn't want to go to bed, that he wasn't sleepy. Even if Billy was ready to go, couldn't he sit up by the fire and talk with Mammy?

"Come 'long, honey," Mammy wheedled her darling; "come 'long an' git in yer pie-jar-mars lak er li'l man, an' Mammy'll set by yer baid an' tell you 'bout Brer Rabbit's laughing place."

The promise was magical. The little boy began to

skin out of his clothes. Billy Rutledge, as he went downstairs, was back in a sun-flecked dimple of a valley, by a green stream, and a voice alluring and as gay as the day itself was telling him that this was an "ideal laughing place." Evidently she had not yet had an opportunity to tell Brer Rabbit of her discovery.

"Mammy," the little boy raised bright eyes from the depths of the covers, "an' if he does bring it back, Billy, the ice cream an' the cake an' the candy, an' if Pomp comes first with what he promised if the white fo'ks doan keep him too busy to slip off up here, an' if Cissy comes — she promised me some chocolate cake —"

"Brer Rabbit," Mammy groaned and pantomimed the indigestion he ought to fear even if he didn't know the first thing about a pain, "you sho'ly is gwine bust if you eat all das been promised you!" Then, continuing her tale, "'And den Brer Fox, he say, —'"

"S-sh!" the little yellow head went deeper under the covers. "S-sh, Mammy!"

Clothilde, radiant in satin and gauzy draperies, with diamonds in her dark hair and around her neck and dangling from her wrists, was at the door.

"Mammy," she said, "be careful about the children even to-morrow. Don't let them eat things they shouldn't."

"Naw'm," Mammy sat up sleepily. Then as the door closed softly behind her mistress, she chuckled and

leaned back in her rush-bottomed chair, talking to herself.

"Who been nussin' dese heah six chillun ur yourn evah since dey been bawn?" she asked, guffawing softly toward the mother's door. "An' who nussed an' raised dem twelve chiluns ur yoh Mama's, — and dem fo'hteen babies ur yo'h grandmamma? Who been nussin' chilluns forty yeahs, Miss Clothilde, in dis heah fam'bly? *I is!* Mammy!

"Comin' heah tellin' me," she continued her monologue, "whut not ter let 'em eat! How she come ter know ennyt'ing 'bout whut dey oughter eat? Eh, me, — I wanter know? Bress Jesus," she opened her eyes wide and leaned over the side of the bed where the little boy lay. "Brer Rabbit, you *is* sleep, fer er wonder! Sleep an' dreamin'!"

And straightway, sitting erect in her chair, be-turbaned, be-aproned, be-earringed, Mammy went to sleep herself.

CHAPTER XX

OLD MADEIRA

"So, if I waste words now, in truth
You must blame Love. His early rage
Had force to make me rhyme in youth,
And makes me talk too much in age."

— TENNYSON.

IN spite of the fact that Clothilde had declared her husband and herself ten years behind the times and the house party a failure, on every side they heard to the contrary. Bob whispered something like this to his wife during the tableaux.

She dimpled with pleasure. "Oh," she said, "I only felt that way at the moment because those slippers were too tight. They're comfortable now. How are you, Cousin Lawrence?" as a white-haired, old-young man joined them. "Ah, Major Wilkens!"

The two veteran beaux were assuring Clothilde that no one had ever taken the place left vacant when she married Bob.

"You know you didn't play fair," the major was saying; "you stepped out yourself, and you never even let him come back!"

How could they keep up with New Orleans and Mardi Gras and society people, with a run-down plantation and six babies? Had the major seen the baby? Oh, certainly not! She conceded his accusation that there hadn't always been six.

"But there's always been one," she said. Besides, they hadn't noticed how time had been flying. Could it really be ten years since she married?

Cousin Lawrence had always been partial to her. True, like her own children, she had not liked him when she was a little girl. He brought candy that she hadn't cared for then, the same sensible hoarhound drops. But once she made her bow with the grown-ups, Cousin Lawrence had advanced her to the list of young ladies to whom he brought crystallized flowers and conserved fruits and marrons glacés. Oh, Cousin Lawrence knew the borderland — just where the hoarhound drops should stop and real bonbons begin! Besides, Cousin Lawrence was a very astute business man. It was he who had managed Cissy's patrimony until now she was, as he said, independently rich. Cissy was one of his pets. In the convent days he had not encouraged her to know that she could afford to waste any money. Those were her hoarhound drop days, but when she graduated and made her bow to society, he had seen that she put aside her enforced economies forever. Now Cousin Lawrence even went so far as to tell Cissy that

she had quite enough money to do as she pleased. That is, to buy anything that pleased her.

It had been his plan to get Clothilde off to one side to have a talk with her about Cissy. The child didn't look well. She was thin; thinner than an affianced girl with such brilliant prospects had any right to be. The Governor of Georgia was very delightful; his family was all right; in every way he was a most eligible partner for Miss Cecilia Dalrymple. Then why this paleness, this air of wistfulness, this new and quiet acceptance of all things, this changed and spiritless Cissy! Cousin Lawrence made polite conversation with Major Wilkens, compliments for the most part about Clothilde, and hung on. All day he had been trying to get a word with her. There seemed to be little prospect that a tête-à-tête could be managed.

"Now that you and Bob have finished your ten-years' honeymoon," Major Wilkens was saying.

"But it isn't finished," she protested; "why, ten years —"

"Is only one lap in the race." Bob joined them.

"Well, you're an example of the love that lasts," the old beau continued. The major had only recently returned from a month spent in New York. He had absorbed many new ideas and was full of worldly gossip about his adventures. "Why, in ten years, modern love is finished, the family finished, and the alimony agreed upon amicably."

Cousin Lawrence, being an old-school gentleman, unadvanced, did not approve of this light conversation.

"You'll come back, won't you?" the major continued to Clothilde. "We need you and Bob. Come, chaperon a house party I'm giving the last week in this month over at Pass Christian."

"Major," Clothilde replied, "pleasant as it is to have all of you here, — haven't we reveled in having them, Bob?" Her husband agreed heartily, — "I wouldn't take the white woman's burden of pink teas, receptions, and auction bridge on my shoulders again for all the paste jewels of the Queen, even if they were real. I am too fat —" And so it went. The major loved to talk. Next to whist, he had a campaign orator's affection for his own voice. And to-night he had been sipping the best wine he had tasted since the War. Colonel Rutledge had been a connoisseur, and for this occasion the cellar had given up some of its cobwebby, treasured old Madeira. It had renewed the major's youth. His lovemaking the younger girls had taken as a matter of course. Just now all of them were dancing or tucked away on corner sofas listening to younger if not handsomer men. Love was still the major's theme, but the younger generation — it was as well that they were dancing. Under the mellow influence of the ripe old wine he waxed more serious in his theories of modern life. Here was an audience to his own taste, — Law-

rence Dalrymple, old beau and unadvanced, Clothilde and Bob, ten years married and still enamored with each other.

"'Pon my word," he was trying to herd them into a corner, and failing in the attempt, "it's good to be home in the South once more! (He had been North just exactly once since the War, and that on the recent month's visit to New York.) One gets strangely confused by these modern ideas. New York is a kind of whirlpool that sucks one's cherished principles down. The thing to do when it's put to you is to face the truth, — the grim, stark truth. Dissect the theories advanced. Don't take the dressed-up representation of any issue. Cleave it to the bone and see what the grinning skeleton you hold in your arms —"

"Major," Clothilde pointed her spangled fan at him reproachfully, "what grinning skeleton have you been embracing?" Bob rallied him in turn, warning him he was very indiscreet to make such an admission to a woman. "Clothilde isn't going to keep that," he warned. "She tells everything!"

"Absolutely impersonal, my dear fellow," the major replied. "The grinning skeleton I alluded to is no woman. It is a theory, a new thought. I was told that the great minds of this age hope to find in it the solution for the present marital unhappiness."

Clothilde refused to take him seriously. Recalling

her guest's much entangled love affairs, she declared that to her marriage seemed the only peaceful haven in life; that the uncertainty preceding it was the time of real stress and tribulation.

The major's month in New York had been spent with a little old literary bachelor who loved to gather about him certain spirits who told him they were Bohemian. These guests were odds and ends of near-writers, near-artists, near-thinkers, whose best was some one else's crumbs, served up as originally as they were able, and offered as their own. The major was an audience after their own heart. He accepted their cynicism to be sincere feeling, just as he took the queer ideas and religions they advanced as evolutions of their own thought centers. The month in New York was a moral awakening, or something in the nature of that, to him.

"It is thought, my dear Bob —" Cousin Lawrence and Clothilde were being gradually washed away by the oncoming tide of dancers — "that the doctrines of freedom, free love, and trial marriage will bring about a revolution; that it will eliminate the disgusting divorce problems, that it will really establish the marriage millennium. I listened to my friend's friends discuss it, and the arguments they advanced were sound enough. I started to investigate, and will you credit what I swear to be the truth? — it was then I realized the grinning skeleton I had come very nearly embracing.

"The free love I had heard so poetically and beautifully expounded as a new phase of salvation for the masses, I found, my dear boy, stripped to the bone, simply the moral code that has always obtained in our own plantation quarters. It's nigger morality; that's all."

Cousin Lawrence resigned present hopes, and Clothilde was borne away by Devereaux Saunders, who had a tale of trusting love betrayed to pour into her ears. She sighed, and with the license of an older cousin, begged him to be brief.

"Oh, what a tangled web they weave," she paraphrased gayly, "our guests, — when they start to leave! I'm up to my neck now," she warned, "bogged up in a mire of fibs. This house party has been a very mid-winter's dream of madness, and Marjorie's 'Wicket Jenny' must have escaped from his vase. Something has wrought confusion all around. Nobody is going away loving the one who held his affection when he came. You came adoring Angelica Goodlow; you are leaving breaking your heart with hopeless love — for whom?"

"You might have let me drive down to the station to-morrow with Dolly Hilton," he reproached. "Instead of that, she told me you'd arranged for her to go in the pony cart with Phil Carruthers."

"They arranged it themselves," she said. "But am

I, as hostess, called upon to connive at such duplicity — and toward one of my own blood relations at that? I can at least do this much," she said. "I'll see that Dolly Hilton and Mr. Carruthers do *not* get the cart. Where's Cissy going," she asked suddenly, "with that long-legged Fitzhugh boy?"

"I don't know the name of the game she's playing." Her companion grinned for the moment, forgetful of his own misadventures in love. "They all want her to sit out and talk with them. Once she is on the gallery in that cool, dim corner at the other end where the scent of the Grand Duke jessamine and the sweet olive comes strongest, she leans back and sighs, and wishes they'd thought to bring an ice with them. Of course whoever is with her has to trek back to Pomp's territory to get it. By the time he's returned, somebody else has brought Cissy in, and she's got away from him, and another man has taken her back and she's sending him in turn to get an ice! What is the matter with her, anyway?"

"The same thing that is the matter with you all," she laughed. "You've had something squeezed in your eyes and in your ears and squirted into your silly hearts. But Cissy must see Cousin Lawrence. You run along and tell her he's heartbroken over her neglect. I'm going to have this waltz with my husband. I want to keep an eye on him. It would be a dreadful

thing," she said, as Bob came up to her, "if he should fall a victim to the Slave of Fatal Enchantment or whatever it is that's creating all this confusion."

She whirled down the long room with her husband, and told him the things that Cousin Lawrence had said, and that Devereaux Saunders had told her, and asked what he thought could be the matter with Cissy.

"Nothing," he assured her. "I never saw her gayer than she is to-night. Maybe she's just shy, keeping out of the Governor's way."

"And Billy?" Clothilde asked. "You think he's having a good time?"

Bob told her that everything was all right with the young man in question. That he was happy once more and reconciled to his sweetheart in the North, whoever she was; but that she'd better not mention it to him.

"I was a goose," declared Clothilde, "to ever think —" She didn't finish what it was she had thought. Bob knew and assured her that they were both perfectly happy, and that it wasn't her fault if they didn't like each other.

Major Wilkens had joined a twin soul in Colonel Greene, coming from the library. Together they made their way back to the regions presided over by Pomp, who was keeping the choicest tid-bits in wine and in the other things for those who, like these gentlemen,

belonged to the old school of eating, and knew "what was what." He poured each a libation and made his compliments.

And the major and the colonel strolled back to the ballroom and watched the younger generation dance. They regretted the passing of the good old days when a different type of beauty reigned. They didn't care for these slim, race-horsey looking young girls; where were the dimpled darlings of yesterday? Clothilde Rutledge was one of the few before them who had inherited the charms of a "befo' the war" belle. At least she was of alluring curve, and with magnolia flesh enough on her pretty bones to justify a décolleté gown.

To hear their regrets, a casual listener might have thought them to be two exiled sultans, bemoaning the advent of slim princesses, an untoward and lean generation, fit only for conspiracy and spoils, instead of two blameless old bachelors who had long ceased to figure in any romance except vicarious ones round and about them. Even novels weren't what they once were, of a three-volume plumpness, the two had agreed. Novels had taken a downward plunge with everything else. Now for the most part they were filled up with modern slang and automobile smoke. Naturally, neither of these representatives of an older and better school could find much pleasure in pursuing their literary tastes, since latter-day fiction was so widely divorced

from all real romance. At such a stage in life, Madeira over a hundred years old brings a satisfaction that only those who face the sunset years, without a dream of the moonlight to come, can rate at its real value.

Everybody danced except those playing whist or bridge in the billiard room and in the library. There was music in the patched-up conservatory, where a night-blooming cereus gave romantic couples an excuse to get away from the others. There were half a dozen different bands of negro musicians strumming their plaintive melodies on this gallery and that one, behind wild smilax in the dining room and hid behind the palmettoes that screened upper galleries arranged for the convenience of lovers who might desire an even safer retreat than that offered below.

"This has been the most delightful month of my life," Marie LeCœur cooed to Clothilde. Her eyes looked it.

"You made up with him, then?" Clothilde went to the root of the other's high spirits, purposely leaving the antecedent of the "him" vague. She didn't want to complicate matters to the point where Marie would lead her off for other confidences.

"Yes," the exuberant young Creole confided, "everybody has made up with everybody else, and we are all going to get married!"

In the fringe of darkies who looked in at the "white

fo'ks" were old and young from the quarters. It might have been a before the war scene, as some one observed, the negroes were so far removed from this generation, that sees them in cities and under conditions that have robbed them of their old-time picturesqueness. Modern insolence and educational influences have left untouched the "Rutledge niggers." Bayside is almost the last of the old places where news of the "S'render" hasn't penetrated, Bob Rutledge's friends declare.

In the circle of light beyond the long drawing-room window, Bob espied Mam' Judy, brilliant of head handkerchief and defying Time, to come to a party when she was well over a hundred years old. "There was some one who mentioned fortune tellers," he suggested. "Bring Judy in and let her read the fate of those who want to know what the future has in store for them."

Mam' Judy was ensconced in a small room at the head of the stairs, and began to read fortunes. She sent dozens of happy lovers off to dim stairways or on to the half-lighted galleries, while still others went to the patched-up conservatory to have another look at the night-blooming cereus, which was in truth well worth anybody's homage, with its whorls of velvet petals, a miracle of perfume and grace.

Now the Governor of Georgia, not believing in such foolishness, had no intention of having his future read,

but Petunia Oldfield had him in tow and challenged him to let Mam' Judy see what she could see for him.

Miss Oldfield was monopolizing the Governor. He was wondering what had become of Cissy. After the tableaux she had disappeared. Except for fleeting glimpses, a dance here and there, he had scarcely seen her during the evening, and as he was taking the six-thirty train in the morning and this must be his last visit for three weeks, he was eagerly looking around to find his fiancée, and incidentally some one to whom he might turn over the charming Miss Oldfield. Miss Oldfield, on the other hand, frustrated his every polite maneuver to escape.

No, she didn't want to walk in the grounds. (The Governor wondered if Cissy were outdoors.) The summerhouses were damp, she said. Neither was the conservatory alluring. The air in the greenhouse was heavy and oversweet. It was her suggestion that they hunt the fortune teller. The Governor saw now an opportunity of leaving his companion with the old crone. While she had her fortune read, he could find another man to send back after her while he went to hunt Cissy. But this plan was brought to a sudden failure. The wizened old crone welcomed them together.

"I ain't got it all ter tell you," she croaked mysteriously. "Time erlone gwine bring it erbout. But you two, one dese days, sho' gwine git married."

The Governor's hearty laugh rang out. "Who isn't," he demanded, "one dese days gwine git married?"

Mam' Judy raised her bleared old eyes to his. "Whut's gwine s'prise one ur you two," she babbled on, "*is dat you gwine marry each urr!*"

The Governor forestalled Miss Oldfield and told the incident to Cissy himself a few minutes later as a good joke, and she laughed gayly with them over it. "I'm glad I'm going to have such a charming successor," she declared. "I want you to promise me here and now, Petunia, that you will be very good to him. Heaven doesn't turn out a job like him every day."

The Governor looked at her with very tender eyes, and Petunia Oldfield laughed and promised, — even while she declared she'd never be happy because always she'd be haunted by the memory of his devotion to Cissy. It was a merry little party, and, overhearing the prophecy, more couples hurried in from dim, recessed nooks to have their fates read.

Mam' Judy's lynx eyes had not caught a glimpse of her favorite. In the crowd that came to her to-night Miss Cissy was missing. She guardedly asked Pomp, when finally she came downstairs and made ready to go home, where that young person was.

Pomp, already thick-tongued with many libations, helped himself and surreptitiously served her out of a cut-glass decanter on the sideboard.

"I dunno," he said. "De' tell me she gwine marry de guv'nor. He sho' er lib'rul gem'mun. I'd hate ter hab ennyt'ing come up ter interfeah wid his visits ter de family!" He significantly jingled many a fifty-cent piece in his antediluvian pockets. Pomp wore on state occasions like this one a dress suit that had come down to him as a legacy from Colonel Rutledge. It was of the vintage of sixty-one.

"Whar Marse Billy?" Mam' Judy asked with sudden directness. "Is you too drunk ter answer me dat?"

Tears rolled down Pomp's black cheeks. He hic-coughed guardedly.

"Is dat w-whut y-you come heah (hic) — fer," he wept sadly, "ter insult (hic) — de oldes' servant uv de Rutledge fam'bly? Marse Billy's settin' out on de side gal'ry by he-se'f," he finally got it out. "He done danced down an' he done talked down; he sick ur 'em all. He out dar by he'se'f."

Billy's cigarette made a point of light in the shadows of the unlighted veranda. None of the guests had found this place as yet. Mam' Judy advanced cautiously. She had to pass this way on her homeward journey through the little back yard out into the stables, through the fields and to her own cabin. She affected great surprise when she recognized him, and approached nearer. He greeted her cheerfully, — he was always

ull of jokes for her, — and began to fumble in his pockets, and she ventured still nearer.

“Marse Billy,” she whispered, “I seed her in de fiah as’ night, — dat li’l gal you gwine marry.”

Something very much like a smothered “Damn” came down at her, but she did not notice the ejaculation. She had no way of divining, fortune teller though she was, that the young man had fled to this gallery to have a fight out with himself, involving memories of a certain girl in a blue gown. “Ain’t whut I tole you dat day come true?” she wistfully inquired. “Ain’t you had er accident? An’ tuk er journey? Ain’t you got er ettah an’ er presunt?”

“You’re a great fortune teller, Mam’ Judy,” he laughed indulgently. “Make Pomp take you home in one of those buggies.” He indicated shadowy vehicles down the far drive.

“Who, me?” she exclaimed. “Let dat drunk niggah drive me home through dem gullies! I’d ruther walk by myse’f! You gwine see ef whut I’m tellin’ you ain’t comin’ true!” she croaked, as she hobbled off in the dark.

“I was a damn fool,” he observed to himself, “to come to Bayside. It’s not the place to forget.”

A rock hit the window just behind him. There was a cautious onrush up the steps. Then a very small voice adjured him not to make a noise. The next

minute a tiny figure, clad in pajamas, crawled to his feet and demanded :

“Where’s that ice cream you promised to bring me — an’ that bird-egg candy — and the cake?”

It was Brer Rabbit. He had escaped from Mammy, who was asleep. Pomp had promised to bring him things, he explained, and hadn’t. Cissy had halfway promised, but Cissy always forgot, — and he, Billy, had promised, and he, too, had failed to keep his word.

“I’m hungry,” announced Brer Rabbit. “Please won’t you get me something now?”

Not until he was safe back in his warm bed, Billy said. How had he come down? Brer Rabbit pointed to the back stairs. He had slipped down those. He couldn’t find Pomp, and ’Ria was in the kitchen with the back door fastened; besides that, ’Ria was still mad with him for eating those old chess cakes yesterday! And he daren’t go in the front with his clothes off, where people would see him!

Billy must get him something to eat. Yes, he would go straight to bed, he promised. Billy gathered the warm, soft little fellow up in his arms while he recalled to his memory the old back stairs. He made a cautious way up them and to the nursery. “Bress Jesus, Brer Rabbit,” Mammy rubbed her sleepy eyes as Billy deposited his burden in the warm bed, “whar is you been dis time ur night?”

"I still got my eyes open," declared Brer Rabbit, "and Billy's goin' to bring me whut he promused, to eat, — ice cream, an' cake — an' candy —"

Billy found Pomp in the butler's pantry, and five minutes later, making a cautious reconnoiter, he darted out the side door and up the back stairs, carrying a heartening supply of ice cream and cake and a lot of bird-egg candy to hungry little Brer Rabbit.

CHAPTER XXI

MISTER HARRICANE

“Give me a perfect dream;
Find me a rare, dim place;
But let not her voice come nigh,
And keep out her face — her face!”
— LIZETTE W. REESE.

THE big old hall, hung with the trophies of a hundred hunts, was unlighted save by the writhing blaze of pine knots heaped high in the fireplace, wide and deep enough to roast an ox. March nights in the South are chilly, however balmy and springlike the days may be. Outside, the weather, as Pomp observed, had been “spittin’ rain” all day. Not real rain, but a mermaid hair sort of drizzle. Now a little wind had risen, and the fire was a very good weapon to keep the damp out of the house.

This wasn’t a fire made of hickory logs, the only real firewood, that burns all night and half another day. It was of pine knots and cypress “knees,” dried and kept for such spells of weather. Great crystal bowls of yellow jessamine mingled subtle, exotic fragrance with the clean, tonic odor of the pine tops and the cypress. On the hearth half a dozen hounds slept, their long ears

trailing on the rug. The place needed only a human presence to complete its firelit charm.

Bayside had settled back into its comfortable routine of plantation dullness. No more smart dinner parties every night, with surreptitious repasts carried up the back stairs to the nursery. No more playing "party days" every day, with filmy-gowned young girls tucked anywhere and everywhere, girls whose first interest in life seemed to be to make good-looking young gentlemen very miserable and at other times very mad, or occasionally to make them happy.

Ah, but it had been a month in which things had moved on the plantation! And the climax had come the night before, when Miss Clothilde bloomed resplendent in wedding lace and a low, low-necked gown and all the family diamonds; when Marse Bob, who could "outlook" most of the other men in just his dinner coat, had quite surpassed them all and outshone even himself, in his wedding clothes. Everything had moved along on the same scale. Dishes that hadn't been used for twenty years came out of their hiding place, and all the beautiful old Rutledge silver. Oh, things had moved during this month, and Bayside had come to life with the life that had lasted the whole year around in the old days.

The quarters had emptied their resources to supply the demand for white-capped maids for the "big house."

There was almost a maid apiece for the young women who came unaccompanied by their own tirewomen. Clothilde could not understand how young women expected to manage at a house party without a maid. She had been out of the gay whirl only ten years, but things had changed sadly, she told her husband, when families could no longer supply their young lady daughters this necessity. She had had to deny herself many things she thought she needed, but never had come days so lean and poverty-stricken that she didn't have a negro maid to put on her shoes and stockings and dress her hair and attend to the hundred little needs of a lady who lives like a lady. A young girl visiting without a maid ! It was inconceivable !

Now they were all gone, the pretty girls with maids, and the pretty and poor ones without maids, and the good-looking, generous young gentlemen. Mossy and Chloe, Mary Ann and Sally, Lou-Lou and Rita, and all the others had doffed their white caps and aprons and gone back to the quarters to join the field hands on the morrow. Cotton must be got in, and early ; some of it was planted already and almost up. Of all the additions to the household staff only Isaiah, a half-grown negro boy, remained. He had been one of the two extra coachmen drafted in for the house party. Now Isaiah was to be kept for the outside work. Bob had told Clothilde that Pomp was getting too old to do everything, as he

had been doing. He had been reinstated in his old place as butler, as he proudly explained, "wid nothin' ter do but butler."

Pomp was in the dining room now, putting away the fine glasses and the willow china set. Even so, he was late. The Bishop had arrived at five o'clock, and most unexpectedly, to spend the night. There were services at the church this evening, preparatory to the sermon to-morrow. The Bishop came only now and then, when he could slip in a Sunday for them. He was always entertained at Bayside, where he had been a beloved friend carried forward from one generation to the next one. It was Colonel Rutledge who had built the little Episcopalian church here, and the care of it was one of the legacies left to his sons. Even when the family fortunes were lowest, there had still been enough to pay for some sort of minister. The Bishop, since the little church had been one of his early charges, felt a particular tenderness for it, and came back to preach there whenever he could manage it.

He had been a guest at supper to-night, but the smart dinner of yesterday was not repeated. Instead, 'Ria, regarding the Bishop as home folks, had broiled chicken and heaped a platter full of shoe-stringy, crisp potatoes, and made batter-bread, while Pomp flanked the table out with candles, as he always did, on either side of which were dishes of citron, cut in fantastic designs and look-

ing like pale green jewels in the amber sirup. There were waffles with cinnamon and sugar, and sillabub for dessert.

Now that the Bishop and Marse Bob and Miss Clothilde had gone to church, with Isaiah driving, Pomp felt that he could dawdle with his work. It was very pleasant not to be hurried. He was putting the willow set away very carefully and overlooking the wineglasses. Also, it may be remarked in passing, that Pomp from time to time regaled himself with a sip from this decanter and from that one. 'Ria in the kitchen, also puttering about her after-supper duties, was taking things easy. From time to time she familiarly called in to the old man.

"You drunk now put' nigh all de time," she remarked, apropos of nothing, "ain'tcher, Brer Pomp?"

Pomp promptly denied this and demanded that she give her reasons for making such an assertion.

"I ain't ter say blamin' you, Brer Pomp," she mollified her tone, "kase it sho' muster been er temptation, fixin' dem twenty juleps ter kerry aroun' ter de y'ong gem'men evàh mawnin' befo' breakfast. De crow I'm pickin' wid you now is dat you nuver gin me er taste er dat whisky. An' you knows I does lak er dram, day or night."

Pomp, even more insulted, demanded to be told how he could give out Marse Bob's whisky without orders from him.

"I notus y'allus saved out ernuff fer yerse'f. Ef 'twuz knowed how much strong drink you been sippin', you sho' w'ud git tuk up by de corngregation. You gwine git churchd yit, Brer Pomp."

Pomp was a devout church member. Being "churchd" is a humiliation in colored religious circles quite as grave as impeachment is in presidential high places. He stopped putting the dishes away.

"Whin you fixin' twenty mint juleps," he said, "an' some laks 'em sweet, an' some laks 'em dry, you haster taste, Sis' 'Ria! No matter how strong you predujiced agin whisky and sperrits."

"Tastin' twenty uv 'em," 'Ria guffawed coarsely. "No wonder you cudn't tell de batter-cakes frum de waffles when you come in heah ter kerry in breakfas'."

The discussion was interrupted by the arrival of Maria, Cissy's maid, who came down the back stairs. 'Ria turned to explain to her the charges she was laying against the old butler.

"I ain't knowin' nothin' 'bout de juleps, me," Maria said, "furthermo' dan dat I met Brer Pomp in de uppah halls sev'rul times, bearin' dat tray full ur glasses. De' look mouty cool an' frosty, dem juleps. Er li'l toddy early in de mawnin' fines' t'ing in de world fer malaria, but Miss Cissy she cain't bear ter smell hit. Ef Brer Pomp had offered me de refusal ur some de glasses de y'ong gem'men didn't dreem quite dry, I cudn't er tuck

hit, but I sho' does t'ink he mout er seed ter hit dat I gotter drap er dat Maderia wine las' night. I heahed Cunnel Wilkens tellin' Marse Bob dat he ain't tasted sich wine since S'rendah."

Pomp stood reproached. He had long cherished a secret admiration for Maria. And he did not see the wisdom of allowing 'Ria to go unbribed and privileged to blab in church circles of his weakness. He was turning it over in his mind. A half bottle of the precious Madeira was secreted under the back stairs against the time he should feel the need of it. Would it not be politic to pass it around now? He scratched his head and frowned and considered it again, and finally decided to keep his own counsel.

"You got Marse Billy's suppah hot?" He digressed with dignity. "Wonder whar he an' Brer Rabbit kin be? 'Tain't but ten mile ter whar dey wuz gwine, up ter de ole Harkness plantation."

Billy, with Brer Rabbit behind him, had left just after dinner at one o'clock. They had expected to get back before dark. Now it was nearly nine and they hadn't come. 'Ria snorted contemptuously. He knowed she had Marse Billy's supper saved. She even had some for Brer Rabbit.

'Ria had forgiven the small boy for eating her chess cakes. She was feeling softer toward him about the affair. Now that it was over it was highly amusing to

recall, and getting funnier every minute, — Brer Rabbit smelling the spicy chess cakes through the pantry window, his cool daring to walk in and helping himself.

“Dey didn’t even mek him sick,” she chuckled reminiscently. “Twenty-five chess cakes, and he wuz reddy as de next one fer he dinnah! Brer Rabbit, — you *is* er sight, honey!”

“Whyn’t Miss Cissy go ter chu’ch?” Pomp asked.

Maria explained that her mistress was tired from last night, and from seeing all the guests off to-day.

“’Sides dat,” she said, “us gwine be mouty busy frum dis time on, me an’ Miss Cissy. She gwine marry Easter. She up yonder in her room now, up ter her knees in silks and satuns and lace and chiffons what done been sont by dem furrin’ dressmakers fer her ter select her trousseau.”

“She gwine marry in er white satun wid er white chulle veil, ain’t she?” asked ’Ria. “An’ o’ange blossoms, an’ ole shoes an’ rice — wid er reg’lar weddin’, ain’t she?”

All of that, Maria said, though she had heard nothing to authorize such a statement.

But this much Maria did know. That never in the history of the world had there been such a trousseau as Miss Cissy was going to have. She herself had heard Miss Cissy’s cousin Lawrence, the white-headed gentleman, she explained, who had the management of Miss

Cissy's business affairs, tell her to spare no expense. Miss Cissy would have to have even more clothes than usual. Next week they were going to New Orleans, she and Miss Cissy, to be fitted. The selections of the gowns must be made and sent back before that time to Madame Juliette—who had made Miss Cissy's mother's wedding clothes—so that she would have time to get them ready to fit by the time they got there.

Miss Cissy, besides that, was going to have a great many dresses from Paris. That part of it would be arranged, Maria explained, by telegrams sent under the water. Then there were the Good Shepherd nuns; Miss Cissy must see them about her lingerie. The nuns knew the kind of filmy things Miss Cissy liked, but wedding underclothes must be of a special daintiness. There would be many things to attend to in New Orleans next week. Miss Cissy had stayed away from church to-night to look over the samples Madame had sent and the French fashion books.

"But of course," Maria explained, "she gwine be mar'ud in white satun wid er chulle veil an' o'ange blossoms. De' ain't anyt'ing else fer er quality yo'ng lady ter be mar'ud in, is dere?"

'Ria's range was the kitchen range. She knew the correct thing to cook for wedding breakfasts, and it could be safely left to her to attend to wedding reception refreshments, but when it came to dressing for these

functions she didn't know what the selection should be. But all de yo'ng quality w'ite ladies she'd ever seed had wore white satun an' chulle veils, she said.

Pomp mended the fire in the hall and warned the hounds with an affectionate kick that disturbed the whole heap of them, lying touching each other, that they sho' warn't gwine git ter stay in dar much longer. Then he went back to the dishes.

"She gwine marry de Guv'nor, ain't she?" asked 'Ria.

"Das what I heah 'em say," Maria returned. "De' say she gwine marry de Guv'nor of Georgy, an' I know we gwine live at de Mansion. Dat part de Guv'nor telled —"

"He sho' er lib'rul gem'mun," Pomp joined them. "He doan kerry no smaller change den fifty cents, an' he es free wid er dollah-bill as Marse Billy is hese'f."

"De Guv'nor telled me," Maria ignored the interruption, "dat he hope he gwine mek us happy. He say dat when Miss Cissy telled him dat I war her mother's lady's maid, an' her nuss, an' now her lady's maid —"

"Dar come Marse Billy now," Pomp announced, as a galloping horse slowed up at the side gallery. The next minute Pomp was holding the door open, and Billy Rutledge, tall, clean-limbed, handsome, vibrant, seeming to exhale ozone from his hunting clothes, strode into the hall, followed by Brer Rabbit in all his Indian regalia, feathers and fringe, and bow and arrows and head-

dress of warlike feathers. And both announced themselves ready for supper. Brer Rabbit was in high glee. He had ridden behind his uncle all the afternoon on the big black mare that had pranced and danced and stood straight up in the air most of the time, while he held on like grim death. And Billy had looked back over his shoulder from time to time and called him old man and talked to him as if he, on behind, were quite as much the master of the vicious beast as he himself was, in the saddle and holding to the bridle.

It had been a glorious afternoon. They had galloped lickety-split over hill and dale and even outrun the rain. They had indeed started up a wind just for the fun of splitting through it, of feeling it in their faces. The little boy adored this big man, adored his silences, his confidences, his great sweeping strength that carried all before it, the trick he had of getting his own way, and getting it as if he conferred a boon on the other person by permitting that one to serve him. He adored Billy's popularity, his easy friendships, his quick, springing laughter. Ah, but he was a man! Such a man as Brer Rabbit himself intended to be. Now he came just to Billy's waist, but he meant to grow six feet and more; to be as tall as his uncle. And his shoulders must be as broad, and he would have the same strength in his hands. Why, the black mare wasn't anything more than a weak little kitten with Billy having hold of the bridle!

It had been a glorious afternoon. He had clung tightly to Billy while the wind had cut and whistled, and the horse's hoofs hit the ground with a noise that had made it impossible for the two to carry on a connected conversation. The big giant in front had called to the little man behind to hold on tight, that they could talk when they got home. Now as they sat at the table together, eating the supper that good old 'Ria had kept piping hot for them, there was an opportunity for more intimate talk. They were great friends, these two, "in spite of the fact," as Billy said, that they were relatives. Then Brer Rabbit, his mouth full, had asked: "What's a relative, Billy?"

"It's a lot of people whom God has joined together in an arrangement called a family," Billy told him solemnly; "often they don't like each other, and sometimes they aren't even funny!" The little boy understood. Yes, he understood. Relatives came in families, just as fish came in bunches on a string; for two-bits a string of white perch. Yes, he understood.

Pomp announced the afternoon's development: the Bishop's arrival; that he was preaching to-night, and that there'd be a sermon to-morrow. That Miss Clothilde had left word for Marse Billy to come on to church to join them. It was too late to start now, even if he had been inclined to go.

Brer Rabbit told Pomp he'd have another piece of

chicken, please, and some more batter-bread and some more potatoes, a pile of 'em — and a lot more waffles! Then, his order being given, he turned his shining dark eyes to his companion. Billy was eating with the same keen joy in the belated feast that young Brer Rabbit felt.

“Billy,” he said, “what I was tryin’ to tell you when the wind blowed the words back in my mouth was this: you’re not ‘Billy,’ no more than I am ‘Willium.’ I’m Brer Rabbit, an’ you’re Mister Harricane!”

Mister Harricane! Didn’t he know what a harricane was? Billy didn’t and regretted his ignorance. Pomp, coming back with a plate heaped high with waffles, was called on to help interpret.

“Mister Harricane!” Brer Rabbit was impatient with their stupidity. The little boy explained that it was from that tale of Mammy’s about how all the animals were gathered together and old Mister Harricane he come steppin’ over the hill. He looked down and seed out of the eyes in the back of his haid; he seed all the things that they had been planning to do, and right there he made up he mind that he’d spile the fun.

“‘I’m here. Hello, everybody!’” Mister Harricane had roared, and with that he was down on them. “He blowed Brer Rabbit’s tail off; and he blowed so hard that the Lellerphunt’s trunk come out and got losted; and he blowed so loud old Brer Lion got throwed up in

the air and turned over, and all the others jes' kept dey moufs shet tight and lay close ter de ground.' That's the way they *has* to lay" — the little boy explained — "when old Mister Harricane come steppin' over the hill, lesser'n all of 'em wanted to git blowed to Kingdom Come. That's the Mister Harricane you is, Billy!"

"He means er *harricane*, Marse Billy," Pomp translated. "Jes' er harricane!"

"A hurricane," laughed Billy. "Am I Mister Harricane, Brer Rabbit?"

"You're Mister Harricane," laughed back the little boy. "I ain't ate but three pieces of chicken; let that dish alone, Pomp," as the old negro started to remove the platter. "I'm goin' to call you that. It's your nickname, old Mister Harricane!" And Pomp, hastening back, had to tell 'Ria, who met him at the door with the sizzling hot shoestring potatoes and more waffles; behind her was Maria, and they all laughed softly, as beseems old and well-trained servants, over the new christening. Pomp stepped back into the hall to heap up more pine knots and to see if it needed the candlelight; and he adjured the hounds this time and more forcibly dat it wuz sho' high time dey wuz put out fur de night. But he didn't put them out. He busied himself with heaping pine knots here and cypress "knees" there in little bonfires in the great old fireplace, and saw that it wasn't dark enough for candles. And

then he went back, guffawing softly, to bring the syllabub. Ah, that syllabub of the far South and on the old plantation! It is scented, flavored moonlight, embodied in melting, heaped-up whipped cream and air, reminiscent of wineglasses and yet suggesting nothing so far removed from the real dishes of faery land.

"I jes' hope," said Brer Rabbit, licking his spoon reverently, "that I'll die eatin' syllabub, Mister Harri-cane!"

"He been named right dis time sho', I tell you," Pomp announced in the kitchen. "Li'l Brer Rabbit sho' hit de nail on de haid w'en he called him Mister Harri-cane. When Marse Billy do git on de rampage, whin he git he haid sot —"

"Den hits *look-out*, sho'," agreed 'Ria. "He's wusser'n' dannermite. He sho' is er Mister Harricane, Marse Billy. Bress he hard-headed heart!"

'Ria could remember the time when the tall man in the dining room was as young and little as the small boy who sat beside him.

"De' all been good fighters," said Pomp, nodding back toward the dining room. "De' all been good winners an' bettah losers; de' all been good, good cuss-ers; de' ain't none ur 'em fell short uv de race, but 'tain't nair one ur 'em so fur back es I kin 'membah er Rutledge dat's evah been able ter hold er candle ter Marse Billy."

"Mister Harricane!" corrected 'Ria.

"When it comes ter cussin'," continued Pomp, "Marse Billy doan hadder use words. I've seed him when he look cussed louder den thunder in August — Mister Harricane."

"Aw, but Brer Rabbit, he done named him!" 'Ria chuckled. Here was another soft spot in 'Ria's hard old heart for the little boy who devilled her more than all the other children put together. Ah, but little Brer Rabbit — he was different! In all truth he was full of the enchantments of the wood and field, and no one could resist him. He was so splendidly indifferent whether you liked him or not. If he liked you, that was the whole thing; and his liking for you wasn't gauged by the way you liked him. He curried favor with no one. When it had to be done, Mammy was there to manage it for him.

Even now, out in the hall, the same small Brer Rabbit was wheedling Mister Harricane to let him sit up until the others came home.

"Mammy's in the nur'sy," he said. "An' the baby's 'sleep; so is Bob, and the twins, an' Marjorie don't never stay awake."

He went down promptly on the rug, his head on one hound, his feet on another, snuggled brotherly enough in bed with them all. They accepted the little savage sleepily, not at all afraid of his war paint and feathers.

One of the oldest hounds smelled at his beads and the slashed fringe on his trousers.

"He useter b'long to a Choctaw Injun," Brer Rabbit told Billy. "His name is Funnygusha, and don't he look like he knows I ain't er real Injun? You think he can smell an' tell er Injun, Mister Harricane?"

Billy wouldn't be surprised if he could. He lighted his pipe and settled himself comfortably in one of the great old chairs in the shadow just outside the circle of firelight. Far off, somewhere upstairs, Mammy's voice was raised in a queer lullaby:

"Where, oh, where shall the wed--din' be--e-e?
— Way down yonder in her holler tre--ee-e,"

and this drifted off into a different measure and she wailed:

"Swing lo--ow, swe---ee--et gawspel cherrioot!"

and then all was quiet again. Even Pomp had finished the dining room and there was quiet in the kitchen.

The tall old clock in the corner, a grandfather's clock that had belonged to his great-grandfather, ticked away the days, the hours, the minutes even, as it had marked off the days, the hours, the minutes of his far-off childhood. There wasn't anything in this old hall that hadn't been there before he was born. It was the first time Billy Rutledge had noticed that nothing had been changed here since he could remember.

Even these crystal bowls of yellow jessamine had always stood just where they were now, filled with flowers. He could remember how his grandmother used to put on big leather gloves after she had finished washing at the breakfast table her fine cups and saucers; and gone forth, with him at her heels, to snip a basket full of musk roses or myrtle or pomegranate blossoms, or jessamine, to fill these bowls. He could close his eyes and see her again arranging the flowers.

The great wrought andirons were the same that had been put in when the chimney was built, over a hundred years ago. Things had not changed at Bayside. Time had simply mellowed the old place; children's voices and laughter and a young chatelaine had laid any discontented ghost that might have been inclined to wander back. Peace rested over it, the blessing of the dead, who in life had infused into the old house grace and kindness and hospitality, and who in death left upon it their benediction.

The inheritance of gentle forefathers had not been dissipated. No discordant strain had crept into the clean, pure blood of the Rutledges. Bayside was indwelt in the peace that passeth understanding (except the understanding of those wise ones who know that God's best temple on this earth is an old-fashioned home) and remained as it had been in the beginning, a house where courtesy was the first law. Here the great

secret was not withheld by those who had discovered it, that happiness is an accumulation of the tiny joys that go unconsidered in the average person's life until his appreciation of them must of a necessity resolve itself into a memory.

"Mister Harricane, hello!" Brer Rabbit raised up sleepily and smiled at Billy. He was trying to give an imitation of a person who had never slept a wink in his life and never wanted to, but it was a poor one. The hounds licked his face and hands, and they all went back to sleep together. Brer Rabbit looked not unlike an absurd little shrimp, curled up in his gay Indian clothes. Billy Rutledge smiled at him and called a cheerful, "Gone, old man?" But the little boy was back in happy hunting grounds with the hounds.

Billy Rutledge smoked on and sank deeper into his chair in a reverie. He was retracing, as he had retraced so often lately, these past few months of his life, marveling dully how all things had been changed for him by what in another's judgment was less than a straw in real significance.

The Girl in the Blue Gown — he had come to call her that — had gone out of his life as suddenly as she had entered it, but forever, he knew, she had left her impress on his heart. He would keep it, a swept and garnished chamber in memory of her — Herself — and locked. He had the feeling that she would come no more. At best

she had been but a mirage of home to him, a storm-tossed traveler on a trackless waste of water; a cool oasis with a palm tree's shade, and a spring to him in a desert, heat-blinded and mocked with the thought of rest. She was not, but because of what she might have been, no other woman could ever be anything to him. He had come to the end of his search. There was no finding her, because she did not exist.

He would banish forever the dream of her. It had brought him only unhappiness and torment. The library yonder was full of books of poetry written by outcasts, miserable prodigals who even in their lowest moments had had revealed to them enchantments they could never hope to make their own. Poetic longing, sufficiently encouraged, might project heavenly visions, but with most of them it ended there — mooning away one's natural life.

Billy Rutledge had beheld, in a revelation, at a time when he was least worthy of any special indulgence such a vision. A girl, the composite crystallization of every lovely dream, every high thought, every fine and beautiful impulse that had stirred his heart since he was born, had for some unknown reason, some angelic whim perhaps, flitted across his path and left him as she found him, an earth-bound mortal who must needs hate his earth because she had gone back to her heaven, wherever it might be.

He needed the incentive of such an experience. He wasn't worthy of her and he had lost her before he fairly found her. But he wasn't one of those men who go to the Devil because the Right Girl won't have them. He had an established opinion of such men. If a girl sent a man to the Devil, that in itself to him was proof that she wasn't the right girl. The Right Girl, whether a man wins or loses her, must draw him nearer the heaven that his mother believed in.

Billy Rutledge, because he was a man, thrilling with a man's strength and hope and passion, craved possession. He wasn't wooing a dream. Reality or nothing for him. If the trick was to be turned by his meeting her in a man's world, he would have exulted in taking his chance for her favor with other men. He could win her. He could do all things on his own plane — but — he ground his teeth — she must 'come out as a reality or let him alone! And she had showed that she wasn't coming out. Well, he told himself grimly, he wasn't the first man who had wanted something not for him. But if he couldn't have the reality, he refused to give place to a dream that robbed him of his peace. He would go back to his work and forget the girl who belonged in a dream world.

The resin from the pine knots oozed forth, and spluttering, caught the blaze and sprang into weird, blue-lighted wheels of fire that gave forth a strong breath of the tonic pine forest. It was a hissing caldron of flame

that sang of wood spirits converted into fire devils. Billy reached over, and from the splint basket by the hearth drew forth more gnarled knots, that he threw into the seething, sacrificial flame. The farthest corners of the long hall were lighted with the up-springing glory of the blaze. It caught and held the festoons of wild smilax and evergreens that had not been taken down from the party decorations of the night before. Farther it crept — the light — as the blaze leaped higher and higher, and rested on the faces of the family portraits ranged along the wall up the winding stairway.

In powdered wig and peruke his great-grandfather's cold eyes seemed to look down through and beyond him, out of the dim past into the mysterious future. Down the line Billy's eyes traveled, until they rested on the gentle face of his mother. Her eyes seemed to brood over him to-night with a new beauty, with the expression he remembered as a small boy, not painted heretofore in this portrait. He wondered how he had always missed it before, when it was now so apparent. He was seeing the soul of the portrait for the first time, though it had been there all these years. And his father beside her seemed to bestow upon him an unspoken blessing, a new message of strength and encouragement to make the fight a good one.

"It is not the reward that counts," he recalled his father's brave words, "but the fight for it, my boy!"

Billy knew the satisfaction in the fight, in putting up a good fight, whatever the reward hoped for or denied might be. The vague approval of some far-off Lord of the Vineyard, in whose eyes a servant has done well, even if the victory goes elsewhere. He knew that no struggle is ever without its own satisfactions. A man's approval of the day's work, his own day's work, Billy realized, is worth all the other plaudits of the world put together.

Before him stretched life, life that he found good in spite of the things it had denied him. There was still the chance to work and plenty to do. His eyes rested with tenderness on the small boy asleep on the hearth-rug. Brer Rabbit should be a very precious asset to him from this time on, and the others, all Bob's six sturdy boys and girls, would be his charges. They should have all the things to which their birth entitled them.

Brer Rabbit stirred among the dogs, and Billy contrasted the pretty child, his fine brow and beautifully molded head to the old gentleman in the frame. He'd make of Brer Rabbit — if advantages could do it — such a gentleman as the stately great-grandfather in peruke and powdered wig could meet as an equal. The old gentleman was rather too dressy for Billy ever to feel an intimate attachment for him, though he admired his detached splendor and the way his cold eyes seemed only to tolerate the generations he had left behind him. Curious

thing — inheritance. Was blood thicker than water, Billy mused, and then — was love, any love, stronger than death?

“Sarvent, Marse Billy,” Pomp pulled his woolly forelock and held out a yellow envelope. “Heah er tellergram, sah. De’ say dey sunt hit by de fust pusson passin’, sah.”

Billy took the telegram and read:

Come at once. Struck new vein. New York office in devil of muddle. Meet me in Denver. I’ll go East. Hang it all you’ve got to buck up and get back here.

It was from Burke Preston at the mine.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MAIDEN MANIFEST

“As thou didst teach all lovers speech
And life all mystery,
So shalt Thou rule by every school
Till love and longing die.
Who wast as yet the lights were set
A whisper in the Void.
Who shall be sung through planets young
When this is clean destroyed.”

— KIPLING, *To the True Romance*.

SOME one was coming down the stairs. Billy had understood Pomp to say that they had all gone to church. The children were asleep hours ago. He turned and looked up to see who it was — and *She* swam into his range of vision — *HERSELF* !

His eyes took the picture of her as a picture. Physically he was incapable of moving. Even in that moment he told himself it was only a wraith he saw, and it would pass. He had a curious inward conflict, the temptation to question what his eyes beheld, to deny the vision to his heart. But he could not. There, there ! Clearer than he had ever seen her ! He staggered to his feet blindly. Down the broad, polished steps, set in the rosy glow of the leaping fire, came the Lady of his Dreams. He

clutched the back of a chair and held his breath. She wore the blue gown that had hung in the cleaner's window. It was the same, from the daisy-petalled lace to the jeweled girdle. One slim hand was idly making its way down the carved balustrade. He could see both her hands, long and pink and bare of rings or bracelets. The firelight flared up and caught the knot of blue that was half hidden as it looped and held in place a psyche of curls. She had apparently not seen him. Her eyes at this distance were wells of light, infinitely tender, and it seemed to him infinitely sad, as they sought Brer Rabbit asleep on the rug. Her little slippers of blue held glittering buckles.

Billy Rutledge threw discretion to the winds. He had forgotten that he must not! He must not —

He was at the foot of the stairs as her foot touched the last step. Both his hands were outstretched for her slender pink ones. His fingers closed on them. They were soft and warm and human.

Is it Emerson who sings of "open hours when God's will sallies free"? There are, like these open hours, open moments of enchantment, and this must have been one of them.

The two who faced each other might have stood two creatures in Revelation, the apocalyptic sea of glass with its accompanying transfiguring glory so encompassed them about. Neither as yet had spoken, but the mo-

ment was vocal. A new song of the spheres tuned to awakened melodies of the heart, to an æolian-stringed soul, suddenly athrill and atune with the mystery revealed, made speech unnecessary.

The past had not been. Only the future lay before them, the future that held in fee this moment. So might the first man, fresh from the hands of his Maker, have turned to receive Heaven's first birthday gift, — the one created to be the completion of himself. Billy Rutledge held a pair of hands quivering with strength, as vibrant as his own. Her hands — whoever she was, wherever she came from — her hands in his hands was the answer to all the perplexing problems of life. In truth, he saw it also in revelation, that there was no life but the life centered here in this moment. Only He and She and the God who made them for each other.

But the most transcendent moment holds its tear, and this was not without one. It dropped from the eyes of the vision whose hands he held and splashed, a very warm and wet little tear, on his hand. By this token he knew she was human and a woman. She was crying and he had made her cry ! A sudden fear gripped him. The other times she had left because he had offended her. Here already he was making her cry !

"Don't fade away this time," he breathed, with a strange agitation. Neither of them seemed able to recall a language that might be used as a vehicle for speech

that other mortals would have needed just here. He was using his words very poorly. He felt the sudden need of a new vocabulary for his new thoughts, his new happiness. He had nothing in the way of words that could be made to do. "I — c-couldn't stand it if I were to lose you again."

There was on her face a bewilderment, albeit a very sweet one. "Darling," he was still hunting around for words he didn't know, words that he needed pathetically. "My precious one. . . . Beloved! Tell me your name! I must not lose you again."

"Cissy," a soft voice breathed close to his ear. "Don't you know me?" shyly. "Ah, but you frighten me." She started back at the sudden expression that leaped to his eyes. "I don't understand. Why do you look at me so?"

"You are Cissy Dalrymple?" A far-off voice came to her ears. "You mean to tell me you've been Cissy Dalrymple all this time?"

He lifted a hand as if to clear his eyes, his brain, of possible faery mists. Then, finally, "Where did you get that blue gown?"

"I think it came from Paris."

"I left it in New York," he said foolishly.

"I sent it to New York last winter when I was in Washington, to be cleaned," she replied, still far off and dazed by the expression his eyes held. "And I have

always been Cissy Dalrymple," answering an earlier question.

"Was the gown at Louise's, on Fourth Avenue, somewhere around there?"

She nodded.

"Then don't you remember?" he pleaded. "Try to remember!"

She could remember nothing. Straightway he forgot it all himself. The girl's first tear was being chased by others. They splashed his hand, and he gathered Cissy to his heart.

It was very sudden — of the suddenest — this realization that they loved each other. It happened before the pine knot had burned itself out, and before its blaze leaped over to the cypress knees in the corner of the fireplace.

The moment held no reminiscence. It was full of the present, and the two might have been alone, Robinson Crusoeing on some far-off, undiscovered star. It was as if a great gust of wind had swept in and carried Cissy, a scrap of paper, before it. She moved in a trance, though there was nowhere for her to move. She sat beside him in the great old chair, his arms about her, and when he said, "I love you," she said, "I know it — I've always known it." And then another dewdrop of a tear would splash his hand, and he would tell her again that he loved her.

Oh, the poverty of the English language ! Trying to express love in any language is like trying to mirror the whole blue sky in a silly little vanity-bag mirror. Billy told her while the cypress knee burned out that they must be married to-night. That they must catch the midnight express. She was still too bewildered to grasp it herself. Joy doesn't kill, or happiness, or, even for that matter, food given when food has been long withheld, but joy and happiness or food, when taken under conditions like these, are quite as insidious as regular intoxicants ; they go to one's head. Cissy floated, and this new love — which seemed old as the world itself and coeval with the morning stars — was the ocean that bore her up, and she knew she couldn't sink if she tried.

It was as if one of the elemental forces of the universe (and if Love isn't, pray what is?) had gathered her in, and she knew that henceforth and forever it would fold and hold her. It was very simple, life, all of a sudden ! Somehow all the vague, far-off, forgotten things that had disturbed her folded their tents like Arabs and silently crept away.

Billy was at the 'phone, still holding her hand, asking if by any chance she thought he could get the circuit clerk at the courthouse. By a miracle the line was working, and "Central," waked by a new essence of strength, force, and personality coming over the wires, answered promptly. His courteous request that she

get him the circuit clerk at once was equal to a command. She barely waited to tell him that there had been a tree down across the wire to Bowlington, the county seat, but maybe the line had been repaired. She would see.

Pomp came in to replenish the fire and to light the candles. Something was happening. It was in the air. General Jackson himself, sensing it, stalked in gravely after the old negro, and took his place with the other dogs before the fire. Billy called out from the 'phone under the stairs to ask Pomp what negroes were around to-night. "'Tain't nobody but me, Marse Billy," returned Pomp. "Isaiah, he druv 'em ovah ter chu'ch. De's 'Ria in de kitchen an' turr wimens, but I'se de only man, sah."

Billy threw him a command to see what horses were in the stables and to come back to tell him.

Still "Central" was trying to get his "party." Billy held the girl's hands and kept her close beside him at the 'phone. Cissy was his long-lost love who now was found. He whispered again that he loved her and she said very simply, returning his kisses, that she was glad.

"They don't know about love" — the telephone girl wanted to know if he was still there — "nobody had ever known about love until to-night."

"Nobody," Cissy whispered back, "ever loved before us."

The circuit clerk was sleepily demanding in a far-off, ten-miles-of-open-country, Mississippi-country, tone of

voice who wanted him, and what the devil they wanted.

His voice changed immediately when "Central" enlightened him. He had been one of the boys Billy used to hunt rabbits with as a child.

"That you, Si?" Billy asked. "Si Lawrence, that you?" It was. "This is Billy Rutledge — Fine," in reply to the welcome and the "How are you?" from the other end. "Si," getting down to business, "is there any way under heaven for you to get a marriage license to me to-night?" A circuit clerk soon learns by a sort of intuition when not to make such a transaction a joke. This one did.

Billy Rutledge explained the situation. It was now nearly ten o'clock. The fast train came by at midnight. He must catch that train in order to make connections with the "Sunset" going west in the morning. So he must have the license by eleven o'clock.

"Yes, I know," he agreed, "it's ten good miles here — and they're pretty bad ones now over that bottom road, but I've got to have it, I tell you. Can't you get some one there to bring it to me? I'll pay any amount. There must be somebody around with a good horse."

"Nobody around," Si returned, "except me, Bill. But I'll get it to you, old man. I'll bring it myself in memory of the old days when we hunted coons together."

A lump swelled up in Billy's throat. Ah, but it was a good world. Love had changed his outlook on every-

thing. It was more than a good world. It was truly the best of all possible worlds. He hadn't seen Si Lawrence for fifteen years, now Si was riding as they rode when they carried the good news to Ghent, to bring a marriage license to him out of pure and disinterested friendship, to help him catch the midnight train to New Orleans.

The 'phone bell rang again.

"Yes, I did forget," Billy was saying; "you don't know who I am marrying. You know my name, William Rutledge, and the young lady is Miss Cecilia Dalrymple. What's that? Certainly! Miss Cissy Dalrymple. Yes, yes, she's marrying me. Oh, certainly not. The 'phone is pretty bad. What's that? Yes, I'm twenty-eight. Let me see," turning to Cissy, "how old are you, dear? She's twenty. You think you can get it here, old man? I can count on you! Good-by, then, there's no time to lose!"

Pomp stood at attention in the side door. "Dey druv de ponies, Henry Clay an' Dan'ul Webster, ter chu'ch, Marse Billy," he said, "hitched ter de surrey. Beauty an' de Beast, dey's in de stable. We doan nuver drive dem, 'cepen ter de coach."

He waited for Billy to consider.

"Yassah," he pulled his woolly forelock, "I onderstands, sah. You gotter cetch dat midnight train. Yassah, you an' Miss Cissy. Yassah, an' de trunks, yassah!"

His eyes were ready to pop out of his head with excitement, but outwardly he was perfectly composed.

"Den de coach is whut you wants, sah. Hit's greased an' in fine ordah, sah. An' Beauty an' de Beast, dey's fresh as daisies. Dey's de hosses fer er drive lak dat, sah." It was surprising how Pomp's mind worked. "I'll do de drivin', Marse Billy," he started off. "'Twon't tek me five minutes ter hook 'em up, sah."

"We shan't be able to leave for an hour yet, Pomp," Billy explained. "You go to my room and pack my bags. Tell Maria Miss Cissy wants to speak to her."

Maria appeared instantly. She was lurking in the shadowy side gallery waiting for the summons. She didn't look to Cissy for instructions. Something told her that Marse Billy was dominating this situation.

"Sarvent, Marse Billy," she said.

"Maria," said Billy, "you're to pack Miss Cissy's trunks, and her traveling bag for a three days' trip on the train. Get ready yourself. Pack up everything. We are leaving on the midnight express."

"Bress Jesus!" said Maria; "whar us gwine, Marse Billy?"

There wasn't any use to ask Miss Cissy. She wouldn't ever tell her anything; the chances were she didn't know now. Miss Cissy's face was illuminated by a light that Maria had feared had gone out of her eyes forever. Now it was back, softer and brighter than

ever, and behind it lurked all the youth and joy that Maria was afraid had also gone. No, there wasn't any use to ask Miss Cissy anything. Besides that, Marse Billy was giving no one the chance to even ask her what dress she wanted to travel in. Maria felt that the responsibility of that side of this journey lay entirely with her. It was a good thing she knew Cissy's traveling mind better than that young person knew it herself.

"What's all dis here commotion mean?" Maria turned in the upper hall to ask Pomp, who was on his way to Billy's room. "Whar us gwine? An' who's gwine?"

"De fust place you gwine," said Pomp, "is ter ketch dat midnight train. I ain't been 'zactly told, Sis' Maria, but I feels hit in my bones de's some'en in de air."

Pomp, in this moment of high excitement, laid a detaining hand on her arm. "Jes' wait heah er minute, Sis' Maria," he said. He was back presently with a bottle under his arm. It was the precious Madeira. He poured her a cautious drink, then took a long, deep, throaty one himself from the bottle.

"'Pomp,' he says to me, he says, 'it'll be an hour before we start. You go pack my bags!' Ain't he gwine dress 'fo' he ketches dat train? He sho'ly ain't gwine start off ter Nuawleens with he huntin' suit an' leggins on?"

"Miss Cissy, she gotter put on some'en else, too," said Maria. "She can't start off traveling wid dat pale

blue dress on, even ef she do lak hit bettah'n enny dress she uvah is had.

"Sho' is curus," she continued. "Dar she war settin' up, pickin' out weddin' cloes ter ma'hy de Guv'nor. Sudden lak she throw evah-t'ing aside. She say she ain't gwine bothah ovah cloes no mo' ter-night. She gwine find Brer Rabbit. Das huccome she went downstairs. An' de nex' t'ing I know, blessed Redeemah, Marse Billy he call me in an' say we gwine ketch dat midnight train!"

"We gwine see whut we gwine see," Pomp took another swig at the bottle. "Us gotter hurry, Sis' Maria."

They went their respective ways. Pomp's duties were soon disposed of; two great leather bags were packed and strapped. Maria knew she had to work, and "work monstrous hard," to get her packing done by eleven o'clock. She was glad to have Miss Cissy out "from undah her foots," as she expressed it. She didn't like to be interfered with in her work, and her specialty was packing. "An' I shines when hit comes ter packin' in er hurry," was an oft-repeated boast she made in the kitchen.

Pomp met her in the hall to tell her he too had finished, and that they were all going to the station in the barouche. "Us gwine ter de train in de big coach," he said. "Hit's all griz an' de lanterns is filled. I'm gwine hook up Beauty an' de Beast."

He took another long swig out of the black bottle, then carefully restored it to its hiding place under the back stairs. Women are nothing but women, but good old Madeira, when it holds in solution strength and a renewal of youth and comfort for a man who has lost his fifth wife, as Pomp had, must be doled out precious, even to a prospective sixth bride. Pomp felt the intoxication of the moment, but Maria impatiently told him to g'wan about his business an' leave her a chance to finish her work. Truly it was no time "fer ju-larking," as the old woman said.

Oh, and a busy hour the next one was! Billy called up the station at Bayside. "Bub" answered the 'phone and said he was taking his father's place to-night. The midnight train? No, Bub replied, it didn't never stop at Bayside. Flagging it wouldn't do no good. Bub was in an argumentative frame of mind. Billy told him to get his father to the 'phone and to call the telegraph operator. Bub replied that he heard his father coming downstairs then, — the family lived upstairs over the station, — but that he'd have to wake up the telegraph operator.

Bub's father took the receiver. He substantiated what Bub had said, that the midnight express had never stopped at Bayside. "'Twouldn't slow up here," the station master drawled, "ef Napoleon Bonaparte and Julius Cæsar together give it orders to stop." But he could flag it. 'Twouldn't do no good, but he could do it.

Oh, but it was a busy "Central" this night! Long-distance calls to cities whose mere names frightened her. She didn't know before this that they could be reached by her wire. Would she get him Mr. So-and-so in Nashville? He didn't know the street, no, but he was vice president of the railroad. Also would she put in a call for Mr. So-and-so again, president of the railroad, who lived in Washington? These were only two. While she tried to get his "parties," Billy went back to the telegrams. The operator was wide-awake by this time. Orders and requests, couched in the friendliest, free and easy terms to this high official and that one, all to the same end flashed over the wires. The midnight train must be ordered to stop at Bayside. And "Central" got Nashville. And she got Washington for him, and in both instances she found his "party," and the conversation seemed to justify the trouble, for at the other end both assured Bill Rutledge, old man, that the midnight train should be instructed to stop at Bayside.

Then there were telegrams to receive. How the messages flew that night! The president of the railroad wired that he'd ordered the train to pick up his private car, which was somewhere along the line, and to place it at Rutledge's disposal. And still Bob and Clothilde hadn't come home. It was all happening like a swirly whirlpool, a typhoon. Billy held Cissy's hand at the 'phone, but as yet they hadn't really had time to talk. Indeed

they seemed to have lost all power of speech when it came to each other. At best Cissy had always been strangely inarticulate when it came to voicing great sorrow or great joy. Billy's one idea was to hold on to her until he knew she couldn't elude him again. Even now he couldn't stop to realize that the wonderful impossibility had happened. Oh, it was a busy, busy time!

Pomp had roused 'Ria, asleep out on the kitchen gallery, waiting for her bread to rise, and Mammy asleep in the nursery, and Maria was finishing up her packing in Cissy's room upstairs. Pomp had put the other women to work. 'Ria helped him carry Billy's bags to the coach. It was now ten minutes to eleven.

Up came galloping hoofs on the drive, and the next moment there was a great down-flinging of a man on the gallery. Mr. Si Lawrence, red-faced, beaming, and full of his own importance in bearing the most important feature of the evening's cyclonic developments, had dismounted and was wringing Billy's two hands off, and congratulating him, and looking around for Cissy, while Pomp came hurrying with a drink for Mr. Lawrence.

And Mr. Lawrence said he'd take it straight, and that a little whisky would go right to the spot. And Pomp had to take his horse and rub him down. Billy poured Pomp a liberal drink. "To keep you going," he said, not knowing that Pomp had already had more than was good for him. "There's a lot to be done yet!"

"Who's going to perform the ceremony?" Mr. Lawrence wiped his mustache and asked. "I thought once of wakin' up Kit Treadwell; he's Justice of the Peace —"

Upon his word Billy had forgotten that there had to be some one to perform a wedding ceremony! He wanted to know who was the nearest one now, and how soon they could get him. Mr. Si Lawrence drawled that Treadwell was the nearest one, and he was five miles away and the nearest minister was that far off too. But that there was always a chance. Let him get to the 'phone —

"Get him," begged Billy, "get anybody, only get 'em here in a hurry! Tell 'em anything that'll make 'em come quick, Si."

And even while Si Lawrence bellowed at the sleepy "Central" that it was a matter of life and death and that he wanted Kit Treadwell, there was another stamping of feet up the steps and a crunching of gravel on the drive, and in walked Bob and Clothilde and the apoplectic little Bishop!

Brer Rabbit sat up straight and rubbed his bright eyes. He was ready now to "set up twel evah-body else was red-eyed in de mawnin'."

What does all this mean?

For Billy had whooped a regular war whoop of joy at the sight of the Bishop — a war whoop that brought three

little white-robed figures to the head of the stairs, circling around Mammy and begging to be told what it was all about, while Mammy warned them, for Miss Clothilde's benefit, that they'd better get right back to bed, even while she winked at them that they could stay. S-s'h !

"You, Bishop !" roared Billy ; "of course, who else ! You couldn't fail me at a time like this ! You, Bishop ! God bless you !" He was wringing the old man's hand and embracing him.

Bob looked at Clothilde and Clothilde looked at Cissy. Plainly it was a situation that no one was able to explain. But it was percolating to Clothilde's brain slowly.

Billy was blurting it out to the Bishop, who seemed to grasp it very quickly.

"Got the license and everything to marry, Cissy and I. Si Lawrence brought it." (Bob was gripping Mr. Lawrence's hand and introducing him to Clothilde, who had already been calling him "Si" for five minutes, under the impression that she knew him, though she had never seen him before.) "We are leaving on the midnight train. We forgot all about having to have some one to perform the ceremony. And here you are — YOU !"

The Bishop was highly delighted to be of service, but very bewildered. Billy hung to him and tried to explain.

Bob fell upon his brother, roaring out his questions : "Marry ? Who's going to marry ?" It was Clothilde

who clapped a soft hand over his mouth and told him :
 “Billy and Cissy, of course !”

““Billy and Cissy !”” Yes, would he *please* be quiet ?
 The Bishop had gathered the two candidates for matrimony, one in each hand, and demanded to know why he hadn’t been told. Maria came in flustered, to whisper that the trunks were all packed and to know who wuz gwine he’p Pomp dis time ur night bring ’em downstairs.

“Trunks ?” asked Clothilde. “Whose trunks ?”

“Miss Cissy’s trunks,” Maria returned. “We gwine leave on de midnight train. Yassum ! I got them all packed. Hit maybe er yeah fo’ us comes back on a visit —”

But nobody listened to Maria except Pomp, who loved her.

It was hurry — hurry — hurry !

Brer Rabbit pointed to Billy and said “Mister Harri-cane” with so much real significance that ’Ria, who was lurking in the shadows, laughed right out, and Mammy joined her. And then Isaiah came stepping in, following Pomp, very full of orders, on the way up to get the trunks.

It was hurry — hurry — hurry ! And yet nobody seemed to be sane, or in their right minds and intelligible. For the men all talked at once, and Clothilde, excited to death, skipped all explanations and demanded of Cissy if she were ready to go, if Maria had seen to everything. And Cissy, looking very irresponsible, but very happy,

said she thought so, in a new, tremulous sort of voice, with a new, tremulous light in her eyes.

And Mr. Si Lawrence interrupted to say that they'd have to hurry. And the Bishop took off his glasses and polished them, and it was he who discovered just here that it was now ten minutes after eleven o'clock.

"You'll never make that midnight train," Bob said. "This clock's slow."

"Marry us quick and we'll show you!" cried Billy, handing the Bishop the license. The others were too astonished and swept off their feet to do or say anything. They looked on. Pomp stood in the shadows with 'Ria and Maria, while Mammy, with the baby in her arms and the others swinging to her skirts, craned over the balustrade and gradually worked her way downstairs, the twins wrapped modestly in blankets over their gowns. And when the Bishop, who was hurrying all he could to get them married by the ritual of the church, got to the place where a ring was needed, Billy made a lunge down in an inner pocket, and, marvelous to relate, drew forth the blue ring he had kept near his heart all these months. And the prayer was short, but it was a thrilly one, and the moment was very solemn. All the hounds had waked up and Brer Rabbit was almost as full of his own importance as Mr. Si Lawrence, the man who even now was saying how he'd broken all records in getting the marriage license to them.

It was hurry — hurry — hurry! Not one minute to lose. They closed in around the two, the children and Bob and Clothilde, and there the Bishop was wedged in next to Mr. Si Lawrence, and the dogs were under everybody's feet, and Bob was saying that they had to take time to have their health drunk.

"You're not going like that, child!" cried Clothilde, for Cissy wore the little blue gown and the foolish, rhinestone-buckled slippers, — and Billy was in his hunting clothes.

"They'll *have* to go like that," the Bishop suddenly dominated the situation, "if they are going to catch that midnight train."

So a long coat was found for Cissy and a hat with a drooping white plume, a coat that she liked and the hat she was most fond of, it happened, and somebody hustled Billy into an overcoat. And there stood Pomp with the glasses and the old Madeira! Bob and the Bishop and Mr. Si Lawrence drank their health; then Bob poured a great glassful for Pomp who, in the shadows, hurrying out to the coach, gulped it down with a "Gawd bress 'em, — an' he'p us ter mek dat train. We'll *nuver* git dar unless He do he'p us!"

Maria climbed up on the box seat with Pomp, and the trunks were on behind, with Isaiah in the "little nigger seat" (in the old days there had always been two little negroes to ride on behind) to watch the trunks and to come home with the old man.

"Shame, there's not a wedding present! Hold on!" Bob called. "Isn't there something you want from here — something that's come down in the family?"

"Nothing," said Billy.

"And you, Cissy?" Bob turned to the girl.

She hesitated only a moment, and whispered it to him.

"What's that?" Bob roared. "'If we don't mind — General Jackson — you want him? Well, bless your precious heart, you shall have him!'"

Billy reached down, and Bob reached up, and they boosted the old dog — who had witnessed the whole affair — into the coach, where there was plenty of room for him in the bottom, with his head pillowed on what had been in the old days a white satin footstool. Pomp cracked the whip gayly and the hounds bayed all together a great note, not as soft as maybe the voice that breathed o'er Eden that earliest marriage day, but just as good a wedding recessional as the two newly joined cared to hear. Everybody on the steps waved and called "Good-by," "Good luck," "God bless you," and high above the medley rose little Brer Rabbit's shrill treble: "Didn't I tell you you was like old Mister Harricane? Old Mister Harricane, good-by!"

Then Bob had to walk off by himself in the far shadows of the gallery to say, "Well, *I will be damned!*" It didn't express his feelings, but he had to say something. The Bishop couldn't be expected to grasp the situation with its complications.

Clothilde found her voice first. "Haven't I always said so!" she demanded. "Haven't I always said so!"

Before her husband could assure her it was indeed true, — that she had always said so — whatever it was she had always said, — Clothilde put her hand to her forehead and said: "And please, don't ask me what I think we ought to do about the Governor of Georgia. Don't ask me to-night!"

"Oh, Lord," roared Bob, "if there's a joke in this festive and hurried-up performance, it is that both of them clean forgot that there is such a person living as — the Governor of Georgia! Good old Gabe Longshore!"

And truth to tell they had. Maybe they would remember it to-morrow — or next week — or next year — and be sorry — sorry — sorry — that this had to happen to him and through them. But to-night Bob was right; they had clean forgotten that such a person as the Governor of Georgia existed.

It was too wonderful for the two who sat inside the white satin-lined coach, which bumped and jumped and rolled on its ponderous way to the station — too wonderful for them to grasp as yet! They sat very still and silent. Cissy's little ungloved hand was still secure in Billy's great warm one. General Jackson was not asleep. His head was on Cissy's knee. Whither she went, there he would try to go also. General Jackson had a vague memory of the times he used to be taken to field trials,

where he always came off with blue ribbons and cups. Maybe his youth had been renewed and he was on his way to one now. Billy patted his head and the old dog looked affectionately first at the one, then at the other, and barked the best bark he could manage these days, with his voice gone, and no longer able to hear. Ah, but he could smell, — even smell happiness, as 'Ria said.

The big, old, lumbering blunderbuss of a coach swung down the hill and back into the "big road." The lanterns were not lighted after all, for the moon had come up and it was a night of stars, great, silver, Southern stars that stoop very near to the earth, especially on nights like this one, bridal nights. The drizzle had stopped hours ago, and the cool wind from the forest came with a spring smell of pine trees and plum blossoms and good plowed ground. The smell of the woods! It infolded them about, for they were passing through the "hummock."

"Tw--ee--et!" a sleepy bird called. "Tw-ee-et!"

And Cissy threw off the white plumed hat and leaned her head out the window of the coach door and "tw--ee--et--ed" back at him. To Billy she looked not unlike the Blessed Damosel leaning from the gold bar of heaven, and he drew her back into the satin-padded shadows to kiss her again, and she made a necklace of her arms for his neck, and it seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should want to hear what he had heard so

many times to-night — that she loved him. That she would always love him like this — so long as life should last — and afterwards.

When he asked her if she didn't remember coming one night to sing for him, she could not recall any such adventure. He had dreamed it, of course. Ah, but the dress, he persisted; it was hidden behind this dress that he had first seen her in the cleaner's shop; didn't she remember that? She reminded him again that she had never been in New York.

He was asking very irrelevant questions about astral bodies and if she had ever dabbled in occult things, hypnotism, clairvoyance, things like that.

Cissy's clear laugh rang out on the moonlit road, and Pomp echoed it, calling to the horses to come 'long now an' move!

Cissy sat up very straight and tried to remember. He was so serious, she could but reflect his mood until it was banished. Once in Washington—she put her finger to her forehead —after a dinner party that had later merged into a box party—she was trying to remember it, every little bit, after the theater—yes—there was a man in the party who had lately returned from the East. He had amused them trying hypnotic experiments after supper. That was the only time in her life she had ever seen any one hypnotized.

Had he tried to hypnotize her, Billy asked, indignant at the thought.

She had wanted to be hypnotized, she explained, but the hypnotist had made a failure with her as a subject, they had told her. He had put her to sleep, and he told her to go to a certain artist's studio in New York and to describe to the company the picture he was painting. Instead she had described another place, and what she had said was so far off the track they had given her up as hopeless.

But didn't she recall — Billy's face was tense — couldn't she remember the place she did see?

No, she had no recollection of it. They had told her afterwards what she had said, but she had forgotten.

But — why? She begged him to tell her why?

He tried to tell her the whole incoherent story. There must be some explanation, he said. She must have come to his place in the hypnotic spell. She dismissed that premise airily enough. It was only once she explained to him, that she had been put to sleep by the hypnotist, and he had seen her on several occasions. He said, she had even come back the next evening. How could that be?

"There must be some explanation," he persisted.

"Why must there be?" she asked simply.

"Because," he replied, "there always is an explanation."

"There never is an explanation," Cissy declared, "of any miracle that is worthy of being called a miracle."

Who cares to have things explained?" she persisted. "Isn't it enough to have them happen without demanding to know how they happen, and why?"

It was foolish and reckless and very bad luck altogether to be too curious. Didn't he remember the boy in the fairy tale and the goose that laid the precious golden eggs? Then there was Elsa. Billy started with astonishment when she cited this instance. Hadn't Elsa lost her dear love because she and her family were of those perverse mortals who demanded to know who's who? Just as if it weren't enough for Lohengrin to be himself!

Once she had read an interview with somebody, Mr. Edison, she thought, in which he had said that even through the stupidest room, anywhere, any time, forty currents more powerful than electricity, are passing, currents only waiting to be discovered and harnessed. Mightn't love be one of these forty currents? she asked. God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.

Still it persisted — the why of it all.

He went back to the hypnotist, and she laughed all idea of this away.

"You didn't even know me," he was saying.

"You forget," she corrected, "I saw you at Bob and Clothilde's wedding when I was ten. I've dreamed of you ever since."

"Do you think," he asked, "it could have been a dream?"

"I never dream," said Cissy, "except when I'm wide-awake. Why try to understand anything more? Don't we know what we know, and isn't that enough for any one to know?"

He reproached himself with his cruelty to her. She said it was "psychical cruelty" then, and since she hadn't felt it, what did it matter.

But he was not to be denied his confession. "I thought you, Cissy Dalrymple," he said, "were — er — er — a witch who came between me and my true love. I thought you stole her eyes and her hair, her smile and this blue gown to trick me into loving you, not that you wanted my love, but because you wanted all men's love."

He took such deep shame to himself that it was all she could do to comfort him.

"I was looking for my Ideal Girl," he said, "and all the time there stood the Real Girl, — with me too blind to see that it was she."

It was the old, old miracle "whereas once I was blind and now I see," but they didn't know it. To each man who holds an Ideal enshrined in a dream, the Real by the same token is not far removed, but not until his eyes, like the eyes of this lover, are ready for it, is the vision revealed. Love is blind until his lids are anointed at the pool where the deep waters stir.

Nora's words on shipboard came back to him vaguely, and he understood now what she meant by: "Don't let

the ideal girl blind your eyes to the real girl when you meet her."

When he told Cissy she laughed happily.

"Isn't life," she said, "like these foolish little puzzle boxes one gets at a Chinese shop? There's always another one in the one we think is the last. Don't let's try to hunt out reasons why we love. We love, that's enough for us to know now!"

The thoroughbred horses raced over the flat places and crossed another stretch of woods and came to the lusty little creek which, according to Pomp, "wuz de very devil ter ford when hit's on er rampage." It was on a "rampage" to-night, but the big horses didn't notice the swirling yellow waters. Isaiah got splashed, and some fell through the window and on General Jackson, who snapped at it sleepily. But the old coach righted itself and they dashed on.

"And all those years," Cissy's voice was caressing, "when you were out there on that mountain side, half fed and hungry, working, if I had only been there with you — to help —" He gave a happy laugh. Then to his question: "Why, there's lots I might have done then! I — I could have cooked for you!" This, too, moved him to silent laughter. He held up her flower-like hands and considered them gravely.

"There's nothing I couldn't learn to do for you,"

Cissy told him, with an humbleness that was unlike all the things that had gone before in her life. "Well, I could have toasted bread — and — and fried bacon while you hunted your gold mine!"

Up on the box Maria was talking to Pomp, who was very drunk and very garrulous. He was trying to ask her if she thought she'd make her home at the mine after this.

"In co'se I'm gwine be wharevah Miss Cissy lives," she said. "You know how helpless she is. She cain't even put on her own shoes an' stockin's. She look lak gwine enny-whar 'thout me!" She chuckled deep at a reminiscence. "She tried hit once, dat air time she went to Washington. She say when she got home dat she nevah wuz gwine leave me behine ergin."

"But the bread wasn't made," Billy was saying inside the coach, "in those days, and at that place the baker didn't come by in the morning. We had to make it ourselves. And it wasn't often fit to eat, much less to save over and toast. And there wasn't any bacon. We couldn't afford bacon."

Again that little soft, mothering cry.

Ah, but if she had known in ~~that stupid convent,~~
~~with those silly nuns,~~ those chattering girls, if she had but known! She might have been with him. He needed her then. She had money that would have meant some-

thing to him while he hunted for the little Trust Luck mine. Cousin Lawrence said she was rich now; even in those days she had enough to share with him, and he had needed money!

Then he kissed her again and reminded her of Lot's wife, of the fate that overtook her, looking backward, regretting things of yesterday.

"If I hadn't had those hard times," he said, truthfully indeed, "I shouldn't have been taught the lessons I needed to learn before I was fit to find you, beloved!"

The coach swung around the crossroads and turned in toward the station. It was less than a mile away. Pomp was reviewing the days when he had not been all servants rolled into one servant as he was now, — butler, coachman, gardener, and general man of all work around the place. Maria reminded him that Marse Bob had taken all these duties from him, that she had heard him when he told Miss Clothilde that he was to be given back his duties as butler. He had forgotten, but her words cheered him to the place where he could continue:

"An' when you comes back, Sis' Maria," he was saying, "I hope ter be at my ole post, openin' de doh an' usherin' in gret cump'ny from Nuawleens an' frum all de bes' fam'lies in dese United States ur Miss'sippi. Hit's er pity sho' you leavin' jes' es Bayside is tekin' on er new lease uv de ole life, wid Maderia wine ev'ry night fer dinnah!"

Maria echoed his regret. It was a pity they were leaving. Pomp continued to dwell on the renaissance of Bayside's glory — the Bayside of befo' de wah!

"But where are we going, Billy?" Cissy asked, as the coach drew up and Isaiah sprang down to spread the carpet Pomp had intrusted to him for Cissy to walk on to the train. "Where?"

"Home!" He was jubilant. "To the little Trust Luck mine!"

"I'll see those sunrises," she whispered, her rose-leaf cheek close to his lean brown one, "and those sunsets — and the camp fires curling up on the mountain top, alone with you and the trees!"

"There's a great deal waiting for us," he said. "We're going to 'be'old this world so wide!" Then a bigger, deeper note came into his voice. "It's done only good to me," he said softly, looking at her. "And we want to see it all, but Home first!"

"Home first," echoed Cissy. "Wo-ow!" barked General Jackson, softly.

"He says," said Cissy, "Home first!"

Away off yonder around the curve came the "big train" that never before in the history of the world had stopped at Bayside. Bub slouched out of the waiting-room to say that they'd telegraphed — somebody had --

that the train had picked up the president's private car. It was for them. He was overcome with the importance of checking their luggage.

Pomp's thick-tongued devotion was trying to find belated expression. "Sis' Maria," he said, "I been er widower five times runnin'. Hit's now a yeah since I los' Dilsey. I been tryin' ter speak wid you befo', but my time been so tuk up, I ain't had de chance to co't you right, but I wants ter say dis heah an' now, ef you does come back, I gotter free hand ter offer you, Sis' Maria, an' hits your'n. Ef es fine er lady's maid as you is wud consider marrudge wid er reg'lar buttling butler uv de Rutledges of Bayside plantation, I pursents myse'f er candidate fer yoh hand. Lady's maids allus been said ter do well to marry butlers."

Now the train was crossing the big trestle. Pomp laboriously climbed down and helped Maria to align her voluminous skirts flying every way for Sunday. He waited her reply.

"I ain't allus gwine be er lady's maid, Brer Pomp," she said. "An' I 'preciates de honor uv yoh hand, but I done lost my taste fer matrimoney."

Pomp steadied himself with the whip. He couldn't leave the horses. Marse Billy was leaving something for him with Isaiah. The train was slowing up.

"Ef you ain't gwine be er lady's maid when you come

back" — Pomp's tongue was thick, his vanity wounded and his heart heavy — "whut is you gwine be, Sis Maria?"

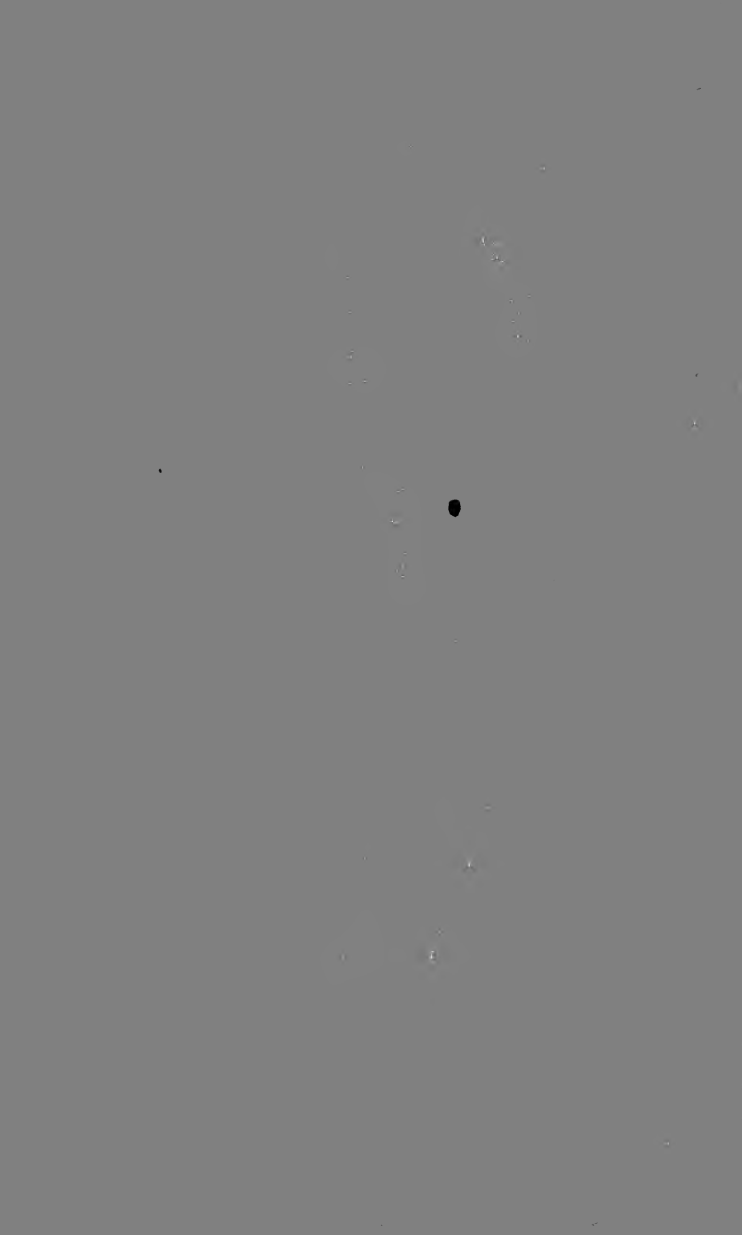
"Er *nuss*," said Maria, with the voice of prophecy: "I *hopes*, Brer Pomp. Tek keer youse'f! You sho' drunk ter-night, Brer Pomp. Good-by."

"Step lively!" called the yellow Pullman porter, as he boosted Maria up the steps, following Cissy and Billy General Jackson and two heavily laden porters into the private car. "Step lively, Auntie! Don't contain d train. Us twenty minutes late as 'tis!"

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